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GALAXY EXPLORER

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DESIGN SECRETS

Blocks

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LION KNIGHTS' CASTLE

INSIDE THE LEGO 90th ANNIVERSARY SET



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ISSUE 94 // 2022

MEET THE TEAM



EDITOR // GRAHAM HANCOCK

A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.



BUILD EXPERT AND HISTORIAN // DANIEL KONSTANSKI

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.



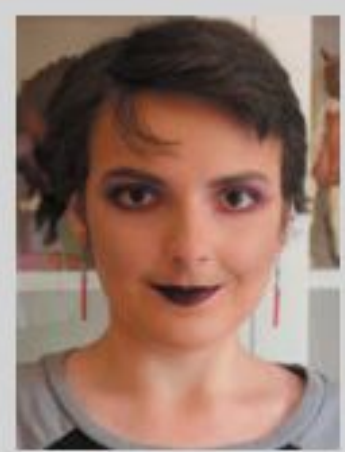
BUILD SPECIALIST // SIMON PICKARD

Our experienced MOC expert who is a regular on the show circuit. If there's a way to build it, then he can show you how.



PHOTOGRAPHER // PHIL WRIGHTON

Models never look better than when this prize winning LEGO photographer has worked his magic to produce beautiful Blocks covers.



REVIEWS WRITER // KAT-REES JAUIKE

Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets to see if they are satisfying to build and look impressive on display.



REVIEWS WRITER // DAVE CARTLIDGE

Whether it's from Marvel Super Heroes, Friends, Technic or any other theme, Dave has the LEGO know-how to assess the latest sets.

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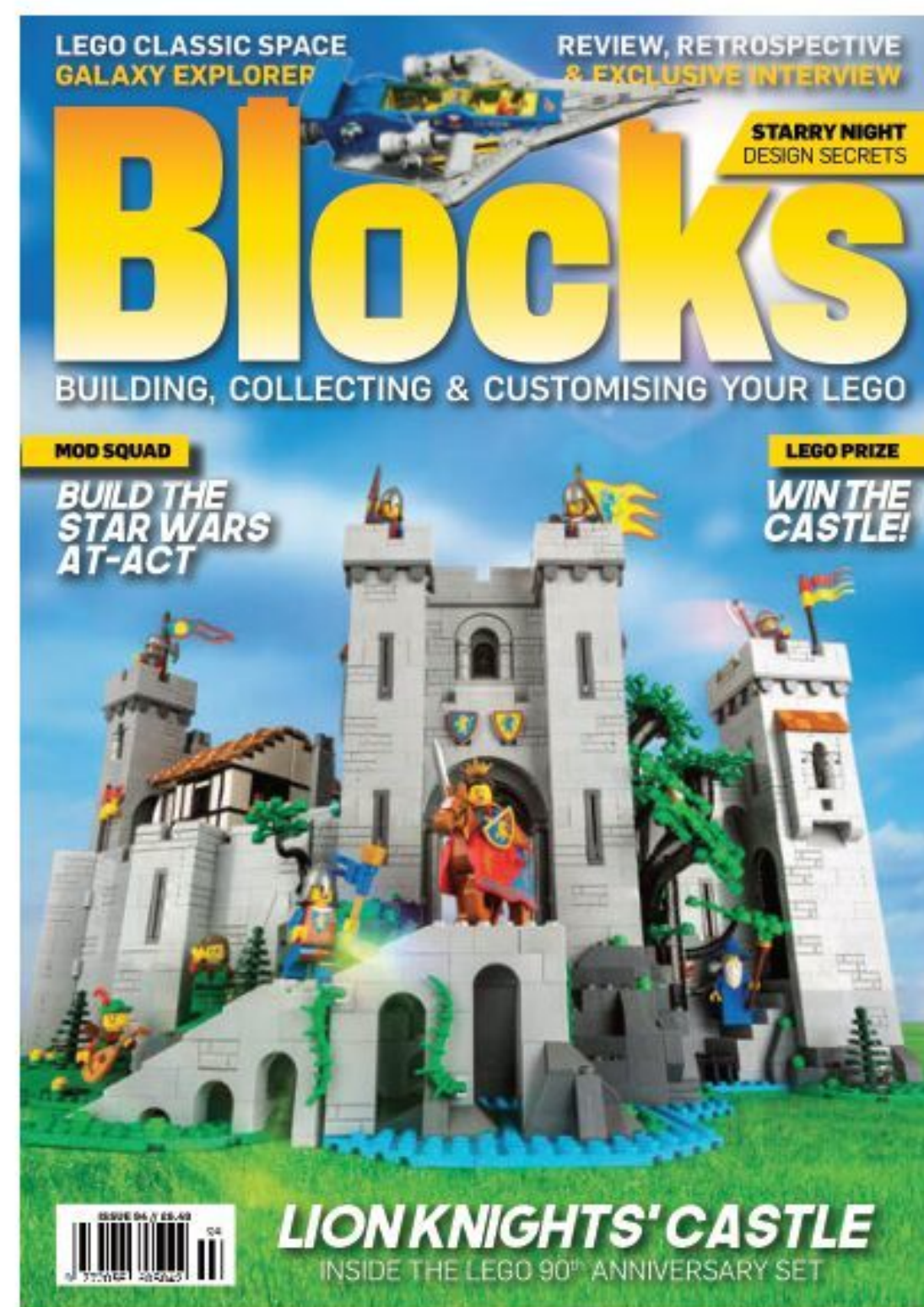
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WELCOME



Cover Pic: Phil Wrighton


**YOU'LL FEEL
LIKE YOU'RE
BACK IN THE
ERA WHEN
LEGO SYSTEM
CAME OF AGE**


The LEGO Group's 90th anniversary year has passed the halfway point and two incredible celebratory models have launched. Soaked in nostalgia, the two sets are precisely what fans of a certain vintage have been waiting for. They were the only sets that made sense for this month's cover.

To learn more about 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, Blocks went straight to the creatives responsible. Model Designer Milan Madge and Design Master Mike Psiaki discuss their process, tease some of the enormous sketch models they built and reveal their favourite classic LEGO castle.

With 10497 Galaxy Explorer marking the swooshable return of Classic Space, we have a retrospective on the beloved theme before Mike tells us how he reimagined a classic set with modern bricks (yes, he worked on that one too).

Not every set is a remake of something from the 1970s or 1980s though – sometimes it's a remake of something from 2018. While 10261 Roller Coaster is an excellent set, the designers have upped the ante with 10303 Loop Coaster – find out how thrilling it is in our review.

You may still be reeling from the Obi-Wan Kenobi series, but now it's time for Star Wars: Andor on Disney+. To mark the return of the character, this month's Mod Squad shows how to transform the Ultimate Collector Series AT-AT into the AT-ACT from Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.

Get ready to have a big classic LEGO minifigure smile on your face, because as you read this month's edition you'll feel like you're back in the era when LEGO System came of age.

Leg godt!

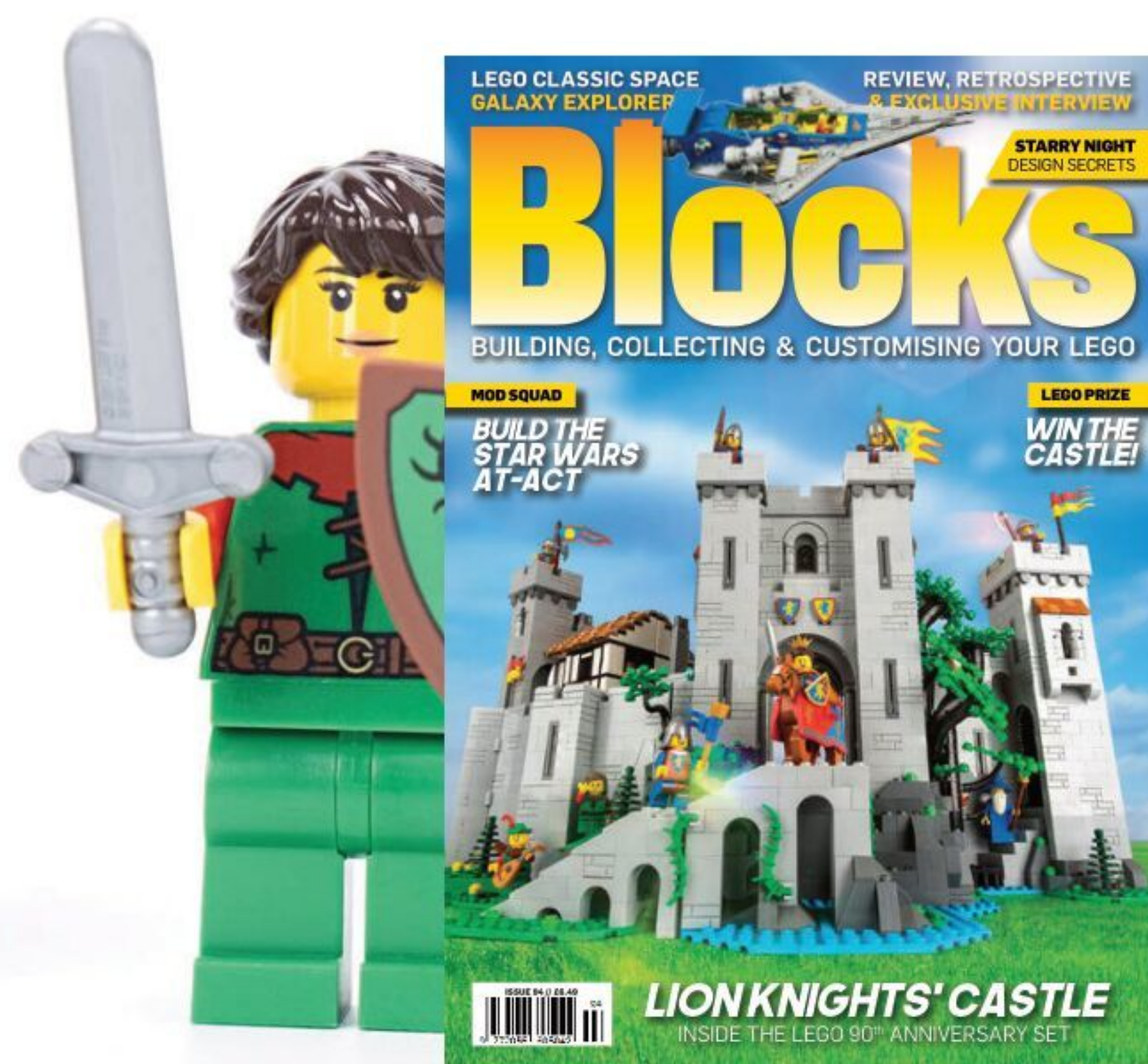
Graham Hancock

Editor // graham@blocksmag.com



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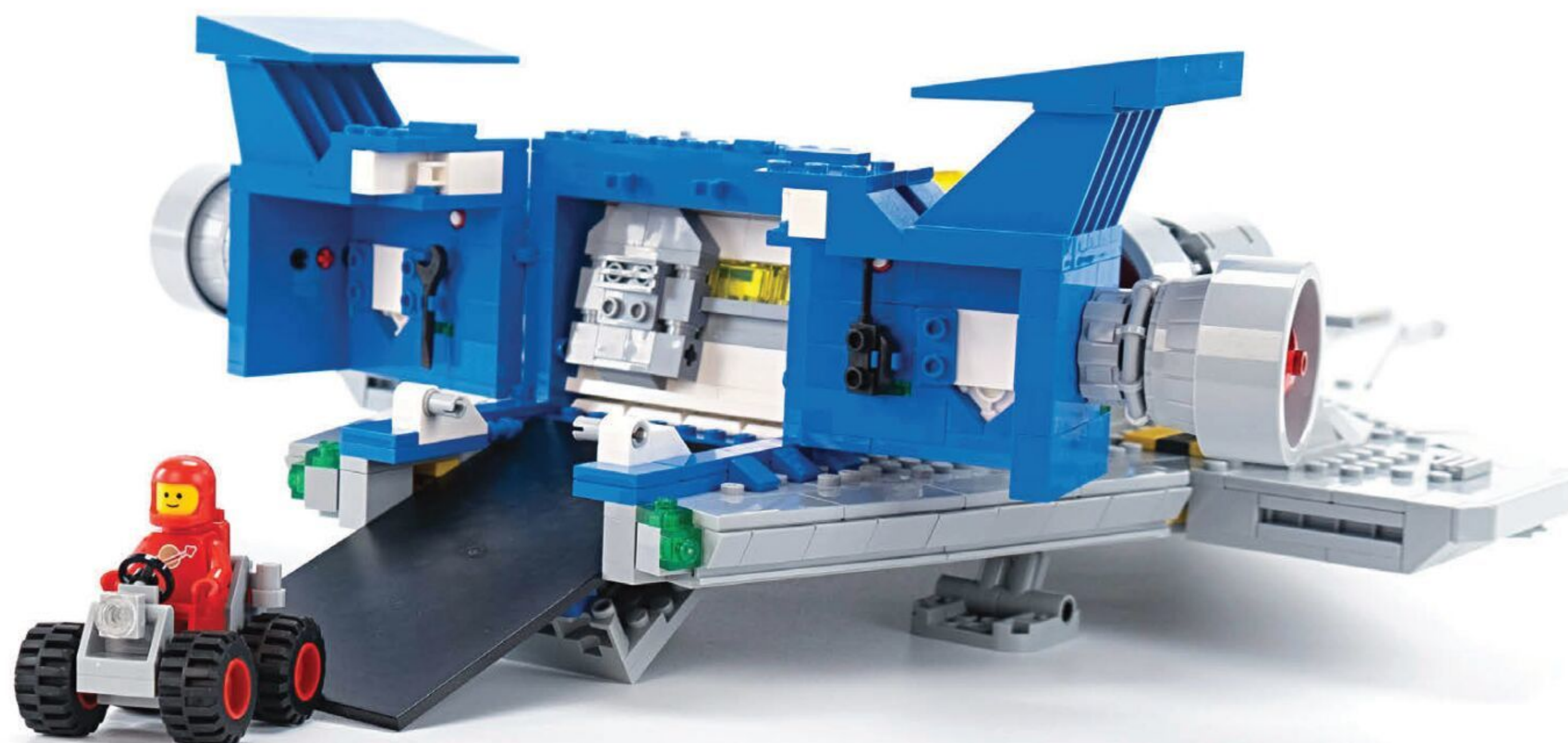
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Monorails are the stuff of fan dreams – find out why they struggled on toy shop shelves.



WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN!

Subscribe to Blocks magazine today to be in with a chance of winning **LEGO 90 Years 10305 Lion Knights' Castle**. You'll also be automatically entered into our monthly prize draws to win the latest and greatest LEGO sets. See **page 77** now!



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LEGOtalk

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STAR LETTER

DEAR BLOCKS,

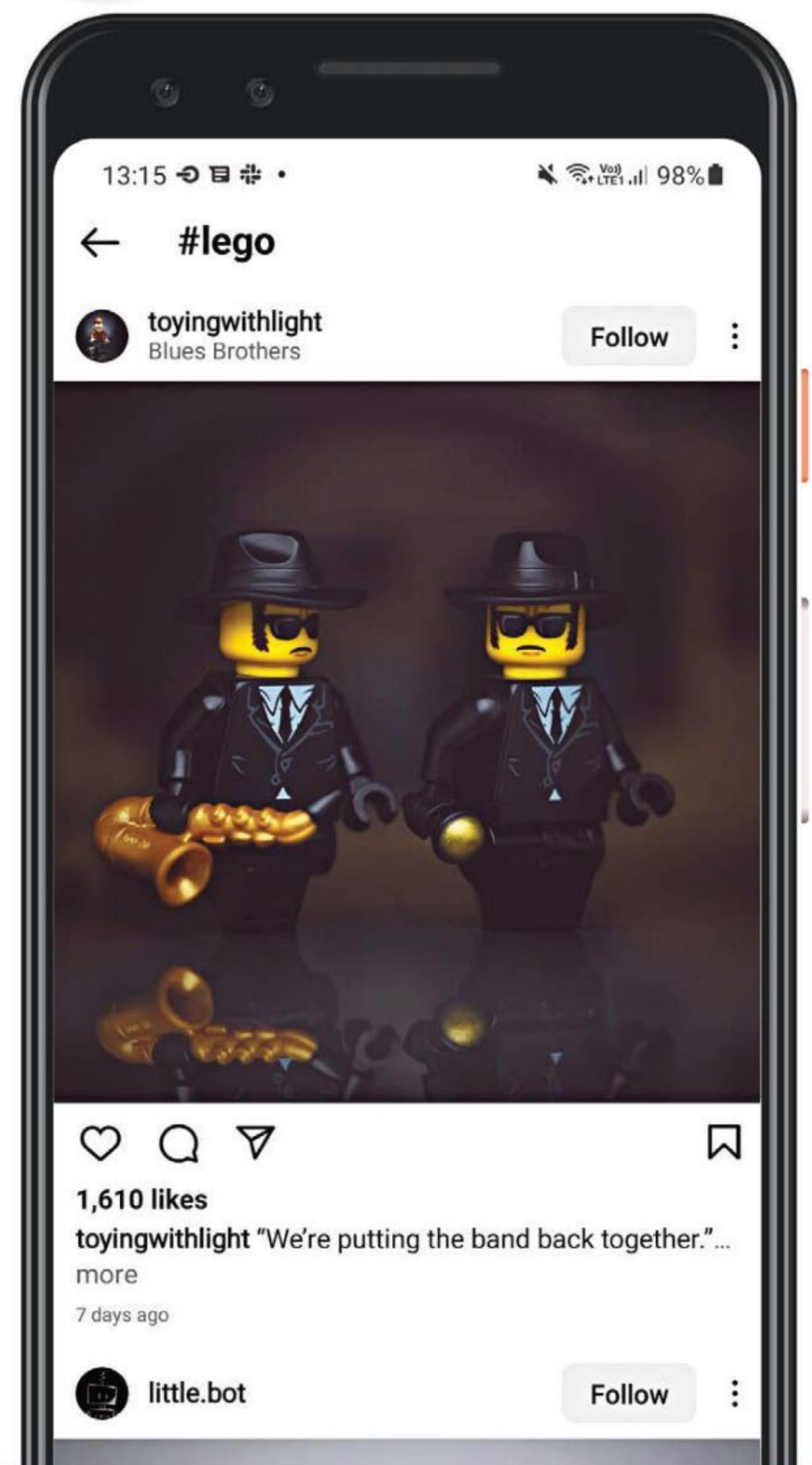
Is the packaging for Collectible Minifigures really going to change so we can't feel for the minifigures anymore? I can't believe that LEGO are going to do something that will upset so many collectors.

It makes sense to make the packaging less wasteful but feeling for the minifigures is the only thing that makes a lot of collectors buy these in the first place. Making them random isn't great, especially when they're being sold like that to children, so at least when you can feel them there's some choice in what you'll get.

I won't be buying these in the new box packaging and I guess a lot of other collectors will drop out too. This is a disappointing decision from the LEGO Group.

Chris Lister

It's certainly a controversial change Chris. Turn to page 14 to learn more about the LEGO Group's process for finding a replacement for the bags, then Kat shares her take on page 18 – Graham

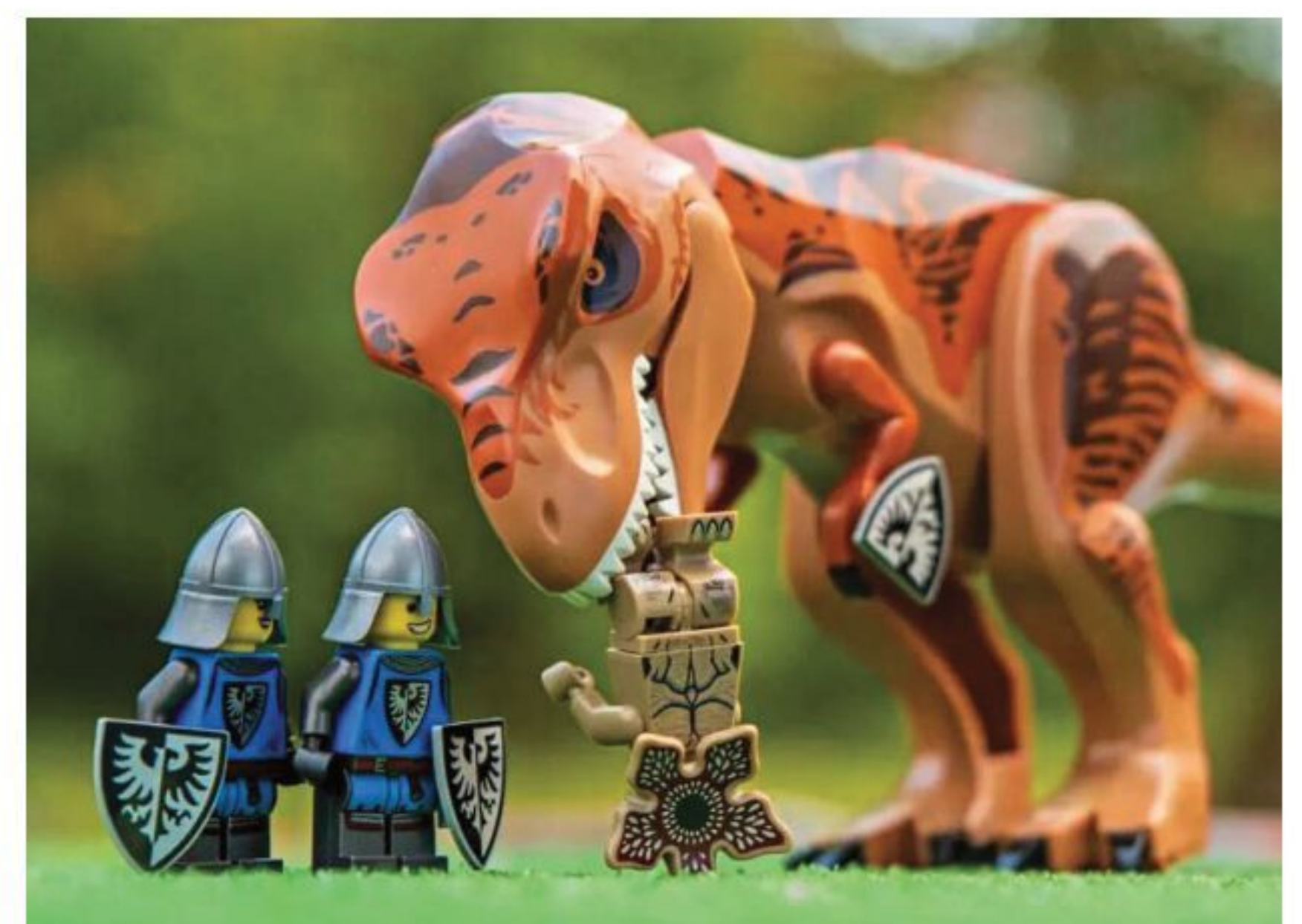


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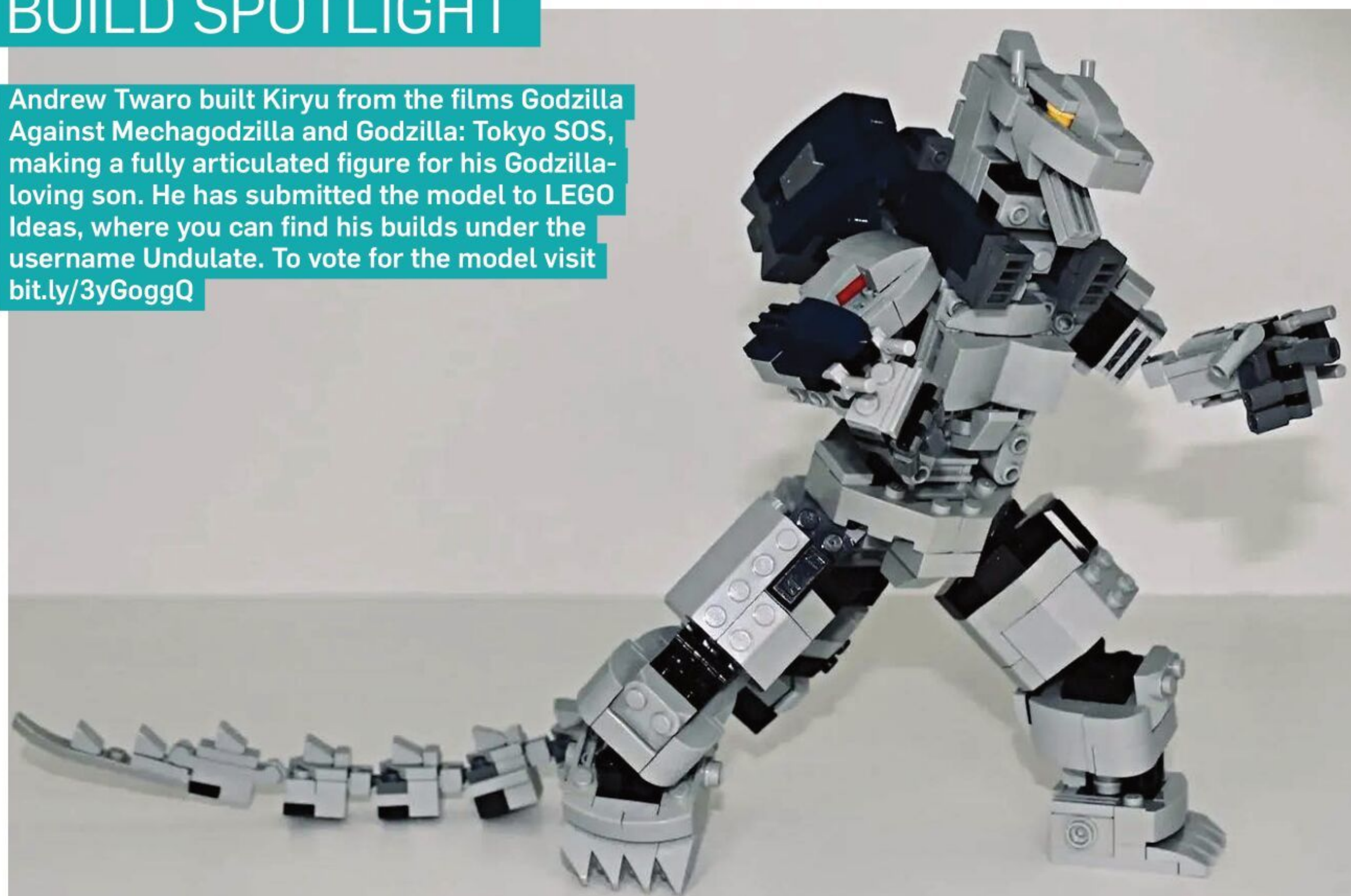


@MINIFIGURESADVENTURES



BUILD SPOTLIGHT

Andrew Twaro built Kiryu from the films Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla and Godzilla: Tokyo SOS, making a fully articulated figure for his Godzilla-loving son. He has submitted the model to LEGO Ideas, where you can find his builds under the username Undulate. To vote for the model visit bit.ly/3yGoggQ



BUILD SPOTLIGHT



Robert MacDonald has built the beloved Paddington Bear and is hoping to see the model become an official LEGO set. He is asking fellow fans to please support this bear on LEGO Ideas, where his handle is macWally. Visit bit.ly/3aHR3df to vote for the MOC.

FIVE YEARS AGO THIS MONTH...

Blocks magazine had Friends and Paradisa coming together on the front cover for summer fun, then flipping the magazine revealed Spider-Man in New York on the back.



THE JOY OF BLIND BAGS?



Anthony Ludditt's Muppets gathering includes five Beaker minifigures...

COLLECTION CORNER

Mark Butler has a fantastic display of LEGO sets, with a particular focus on Architecture. Spot the first and 90th editions of Blocks magazine at the very top.



CUSTOMISE YOUR CAMARO

Chevy's iconic muscle car has arrived in the brick, with different build options for making it your own



Build it, then rebuild it.



GENERAL MOTOR'S ANSWER to the Ford Mustang is pulling into the LEGO garage to give petrolheads another slick, brick muscle car. Journalists in the 1960s were told that a Camaro is a 'a small, vicious animal that eats Mustangs' – and now LEGO fans can compare the two cars side by side for themselves.

10304 Chevrolet Camaro Z28 continues the run of detailed model cars in the LEGO Icons theme. This version of the muscle car is based on the 1969 performance model, immediately recognisable thanks to its stripes.

Continuing the trend for functionality in this series, the 1,458-piece set includes a working steering wheel, a detailed engine as well as opening and closing doors. The racing stripes are included in three colours – red, white and grey – so you can choose which colour to complement the black of the car. That's not all though; the designers have also provided options for hard top and convertible configurations – meaning there are multiple different ways to display this set.

'The 1969 Camaro Z28 has been turning heads on and off the roads for decades, which is why we are so proud to see it come to life in a

WITH ITS CLASSIC LINES AND SLEEK DESIGN, THE 1969 CAMARO Z28 IS UNRIVALLED IN ITS ELEGANCE – WHICH IS WHY IT WAS SUCH A WONDERFUL INSPIRATION FOR THIS LEGO DESIGN

brand-new way via LEGO bricks,' said Chevrolet Camaro Product Marketing Manager Harlan Charles. 'Anyone who loves the iconic design of the 1969 Camaro Z28 now has the thrill of building this set and displaying it in their home.'

'With its classic lines and sleek design, the 1969 Camaro Z28 is unrivalled in its elegance – which is why it was such a wonderful inspiration for this LEGO design,' said LEGO Designer Sven Franic. 'By building this set, you can envision yourself at the wheel, and all but feel the rumble of the engine taking you down an open road.'

There's a fun reference to the LEGO Model Team theme in the set, which delivered detailed model vehicles in the 1980s and 1990s, with a stickered tile referencing the classic 5541 Blue Fury model from 1995. Another neat inclusion is on the licence plate – there's an option that reads 'P4N T3R' – a nod to the 'panther' codename that the car went by before it was unveiled as the Camaro. ■

10304 CHEVROLET CAMARO Z28 IS AVAILABLE NOW.

BOW BEFORE BRICK BOWSER

The King of the Koopas is coming as a detailed, towering LEGO figure



A new element is used on the shell.

It's a 2,807 piece set.



Bowser makes for a towering model.

THIS YEAR'S LEGO Super Mario adult set has been announced as 71411 The Mighty Bowser. Mario's most familiar nemesis is made up of 2,807 pieces and stands on an atmospheric display base to make him all the more intimidating.

The curved cylindrical elements introduced in 43179 Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse are used extensively in the build to capture the curves and ensure that the model looks just like the character does in the Super Mario video games. A new 3x3x3 ogive element is used on the shell for authenticity.

Rather than being a static display model, the build includes a few functions. A trigger opens

and closes the character's mouth as well as sending a fireball flying, while a button turns the head back and forth, giving the impression that the character has come to life. Puppetry inspired 'loose' joints in the legs and tail so that when the figure is lifted, it looks as if he is jumping like in the game.

The interactive LEGO Super Mario figure can take on Bowser by being placed in front of him, then jumping all over the King of the Koopas until he is defeated.

'Bowser is, quite simply, the ultimate boss – and we're delighted to announce that we're introducing this oversized version to the LEGO Super Mario adult line for a little added peril,'

said LEGO Senior Designer Carl Merriam. 'Since we launched LEGO Super Mario two years ago, we've been on such a journey – gradually expanding with the most iconic and recognizable characters of the LEGO Super Mario universe.'

'He might be the big boss, but he still brings back a warm feeling of nostalgia to adult Super Mario fans worldwide. Just as defeating Bowser was always the ultimate challenge in the Super Mario games, here we're challenging fans to build the King of the Koopas from nearly 3,000 pieces.' ■

71411 THE MIGHTY BOWSER WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM OCTOBER 1.



■ SET OF THE MONTH // 40574 LEGO BRAND STORE

There's a new meta LEGO set offering fans the option of building a LEGO Store. It's a fun little model that includes references to in-store experiences such as Pick a Brick and Minifigure Factory. In the store window there are mini models on display, including a classic train and 71040 The Disney Castle. The only thing missing in this latest version is a LEGO Store employee minifigure.

■ QUICK QUOTE // JOEL MCHALE

Responding to LEGO CON 2002 co-host Vick Hope's promise of seeing new sets for the very first time, Joel McHale declared: 'Unless they've already been leaked online, so let me just check, since we've come on air. Yeah, almost four, that's a lot.'

BLOCKS BOOKS

HOW TO BE A...

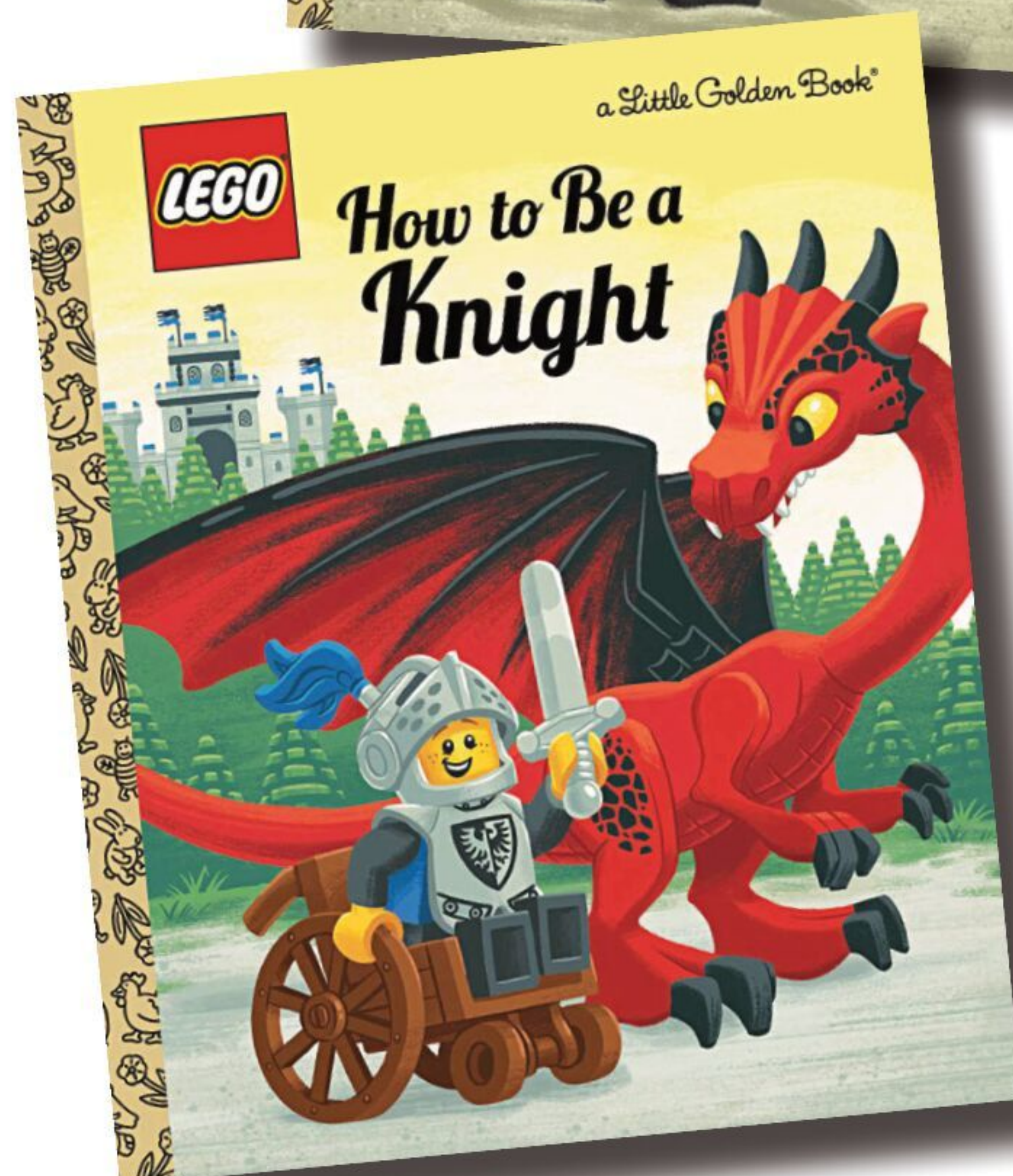
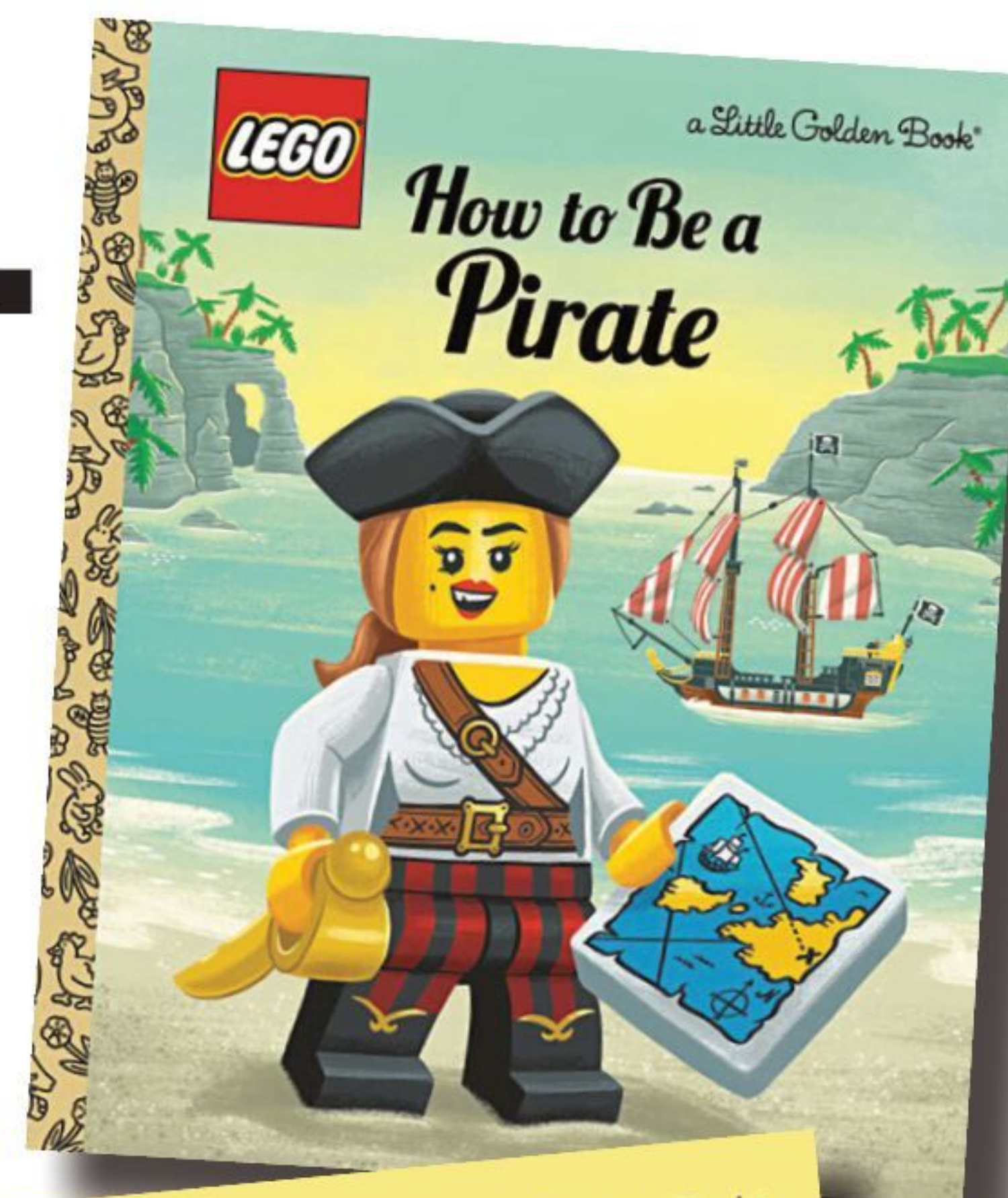
IN A NEW publishing collaboration, the LEGO Group has joined forces with Little Golden Books to produce two illustrated stories based on iconic brick themes. Those beautiful storybooks with the gold binding have a special place in the heart of those who grew up with them.

How to Be a Knight and How to Be a Pirate emphasise not judging people based on appearances. Each author turns stereotypes on their heads – pirating is about teamwork rather than pillaging, while dragons aren't always vengeful beasts. These stories are aimed at children, so the stakes aren't high, yet they are still full of heart and powerful moral messages.

Josh Lewis's illustrations are absolutely beautiful, capturing the charm of LEGO bricks alongside some familiar sets. The pirate ship is clearly based off 6285 Black Seas Barracuda, while the medieval village seems reminiscent of 10193 Medieval Market Village. There's also a nod to the Collectible Minifigures as the Queen from Series 15 is one of the main characters in the Knight's tale. Looking at the pages is reminiscent of watching The LEGO Movie as brick lines, studs and the official LEGO colour palette are all adhered to.

Children who love LEGO (and even those who don't) will definitely enjoy these stories. Adult fans are likely to enjoy geeking out over all of the authentic LEGO references. ■

LITTLE GOLDEN BOOKS, £4.99/\$5.99



NEWS IN BRIEF

■ TLM CAST REUNITES

In a special preview episode of LEGO Masters USA to promote Jurassic World: Dominion, Emmet and Batman from The LEGO Movie were reunited. Host Will Arnett was joined by Chris Pratt, who stopped by with Velociraptor Blue to cause some chaos on set and inspire the contestants.

■ DOTS x DISNEY

A selection of new DOTS sets make use of the Mickey Mouse silhouette piece as well as new printed tiles to offer the theme's typical buildable photo frames, wristbands and storage boxes but with an added touch of Disney. The sets feature Mickey and the gang.

■ TORMOD RETIRES

Tormod Askildsen, who has worked at the LEGO Group for 39 years, is stepping down this year. He has been instrumental in shaping the way that the company embraces the adult community and makes sets for children at heart. He wrote: 'I will leave the company with pride of what we have achieved together and a strong confidence that the LEGO hobby will grow, and [AFOLs] will continue to be at the centre of it.'

■ TERMINAL TEMPTATION

LEGO Stores are going to open in UK airport terminals, with Gatwick and Stansted both getting branded shops for travellers to peruse. While not necessarily the most convenient place to buy LEGO sets, they will at least help pass the time when waiting for a flight.

JUST THE FACTS

NEW LEGO FACTORY TO OPEN IN THE USA



The LEGO Group is investing more than \$1 billion.

Production from the facility is scheduled to start in 2025.

The factory will be located in Chesterfield County, Virginia.

This follows announcements of factory expansions in Europe and China.

The LEGO Group closed its previous US factory in 2006 and started making bricks in Mexico.



HOT TOPIC

Blocks staffers debate the big bulletins



THIS MONTH: With the LEGO Group updating classic sets, the Blocks team suggests which classic models should be modernised next



Kat Rees-Jauke

I REMEMBER PLAYING WITH A SECOND HAND COPY

Growing up in the noughties means I missed out on every classic LEGO set that is raved about. It's fine though – I have my early modular buildings to covet. However, if there's one set that I would love to see updated and re-released then it's 6975 Alien Avenger from 1997. Why this set? Well I remember playing with a second hand copy, which was incomplete, but I was still obsessed with it and no wonder I now love grey Star Wars ships. Seeing this UFO set upscaled into a proper flying saucer with a spacious interior would be amazing, not to mention an excuse to bring back the fluorescent green canopy elements for the cockpit. 6975 originally split into different modules and I would definitely want that option retained – including the alien exploration rover. As for the aliens I wouldn't mind if they were more alien-like than those in the the original set. Most importantly it would need to spark the 1990s Space nostalgia that I surprisingly got a taste of in the early 2000s.



Graham Hancock

IMPERIAL TRADING POST OFFERS A SENSE CARIBBEAN LIFE

6277 Imperial Trading Post, or Port Royal as I knew it as when I was a child, would be the perfect next Pirates set to revisit. 21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay delivered the moist iconic ship from the theme and it seems right that the Imperials should get a similar sized update to complement it. While 6276 Eldorado Fortress might seem the obvious choice, it has been recreated so many times by fans that there's the risk an official version can only disappoint. What's more, Imperial Trading Post offers a broader sense of life in the Caribbean. Having the dock area as well as the main island would allow the designers to deliver something a little like 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, in that it could provide a taste of general life as well as covering the well-armed soldiers who will be going after Redbeard and friends.



Daniel Konstanski

MESSAGE INTERCEPT BASE IS ABSOLUTELY MASSIVE

If the LEGO Group begins to make a habit of updating and re-releasing classic sets from my youth, there is a Space set would be the holy grail for me – Blacktron I's 6987 Message Intercept Base from 1988. This absolute beauty fell in the period where designers were transitioning from the open-ended Classic Space era to formalised factions. Blacktron's towering base borrows a lot of its design features, such as opening landing bays and movable towers, from older Classic Space techniques but casts them in the distinctive yellow and black colour scheme all of the sets sported. Message Intercept Base is absolutely massive, with huge panels and transparent domes spread across two 32x32 plates, one of which re-used the beloved crater baseplate. It would be incredible to see what modern designers could do with the massive increase in parts which has occurred since the late 1980s. While a longshot, such a remake would be mindbogglingly awesome.

Galaxy Explorer is back.



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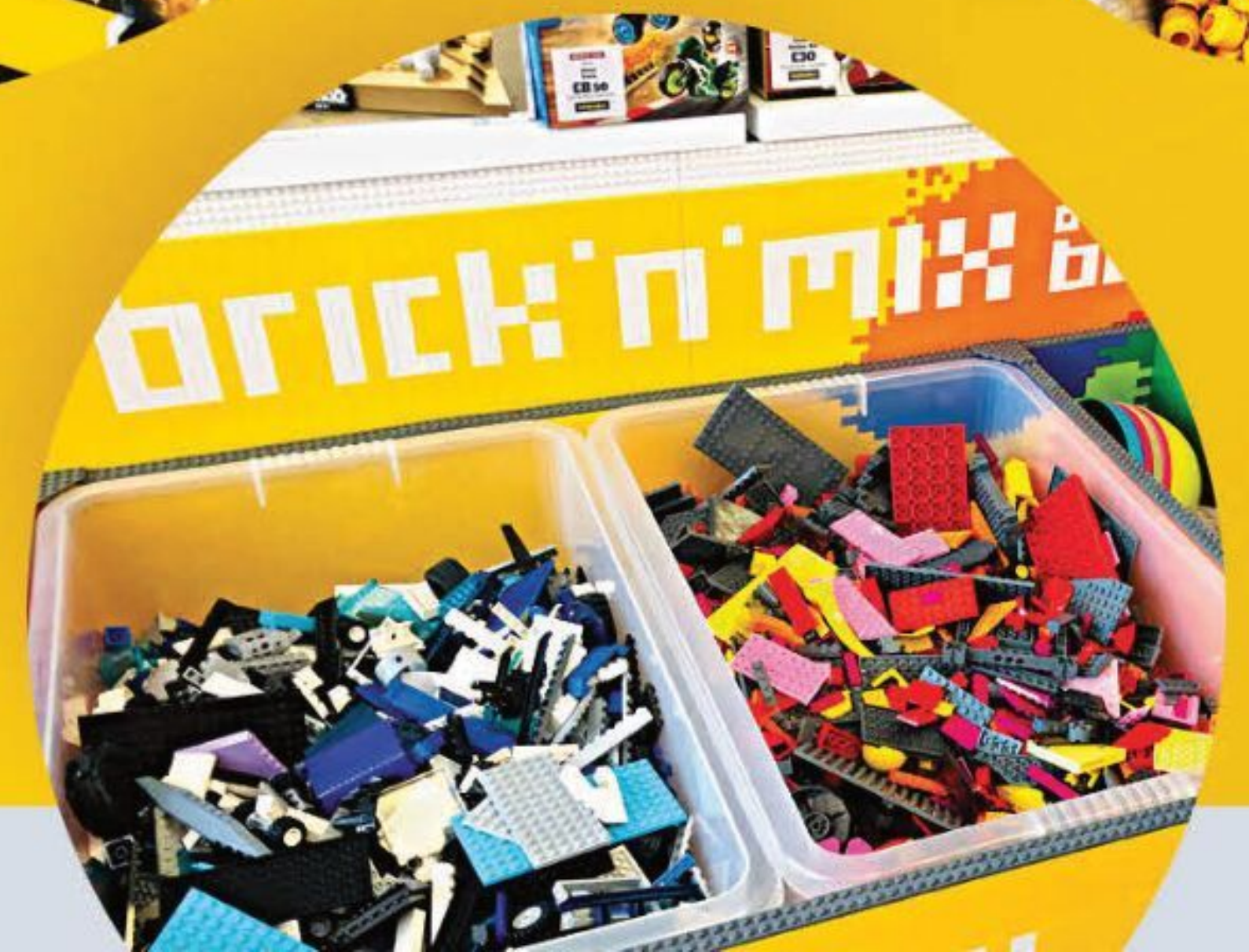
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FROM BAGS TO BOXES

Collectible Minifigures will get new packaging in 2023 as the LEGO Group seeks to eliminate single-use plastics

Words: Graham Hancock **Pics:** The LEGO Group

Collectors are used to feeling foil bags..



THE BELOVED BLIND bag is on the way out – and with it the whole process of feeling pieces and predicting which Collectible Minifigure you're about to buy. It's part of the LEGO Group's commitment to removing single-use plastic from packaging and replacing it with recycled and/or renewable materials by 2025.

Some consumers will be delighted that the plastic toys will no longer come in plastic packaging, but others will be disappointed that feeling for certain minifigures is no longer an option. The decision has not been made through ignorance – during a presentation, Marketing Manager Myra Lind explains that the company is very much aware that collectors like to feel for parts:

'We have to acknowledge that there is a need for the element of the experience within Minifigures and we recognise that there is a culture within Minifigures. It's a culture actually which wasn't even designed into the product originally. It's one that's come about, which is feeling the bag and we talked a lot into this as

part of the briefing because it is something that we recognise is so important.'

The brief that Myra refers to was needed in 2019, when the journey began to find a replacement for the shiny bags that Collectible Minifigures have arrived in for more than 10 years. As well as bearing in mind the feeling for parts, the team also took into account the need for everything to stay securely within the packaging and for it to minimise opportunities for theft.

The brief was: 'To find a packaging solution for LEGO Minifigures that is made from renewable materials and [is] recyclable.'

WE DID A LOT OF SKETCHING, WE DID A LOT OF EXPLORATION

With that in place, the LEGO Group researched the materials that are available and what competitors are using – not just other toy companies, also looking at products from a range of sectors.

That research provided direction. 'We did a lot of sketching, we did a lot of exploration, try-outs here and there,' says Packaging Specialist Lukas Brza.

Five distinct options came out of this phase of

the process. The one they were aiming for was a paper-based bag, similar to the current foil one. A moulded pulp (it's the material now used for LEGO advent calendar inserts) pack with a deep embossed paper cover was also considered and would have allowed for unique shaping to the packets. Then three versions of a cardboard packet were also options – a cube (with the option to add shapes on the front), a triangle and a pillow.

'Unfortunately we had to go away from the paper based bag because when we tried to look into different thicknesses, different types of paper ... anytime we wanted to touch and feel the element inside we easily broke it. So unfortunately the technology isn't there yet, maybe in the future we can revisit it, but right now we cannot just simply replace with paper in this context,' Lukas explains. The deep embossed paper also broke too easily, making cardboard the only solution left standing.

Of the three cardboard options, the cubical box was selected. The LEGO Group's internal marketing agency tried out some different designs to explore how the graphics would look on the new packaging.

Three final options were developed, all using the cube box, but with slightly different shaping on the front. Consumer research and internal discussions landed on the most simple of the trio, the square front with rounded corners.

Learnings have been taken from the boxes

Paper based bag exploration.



Deep embossed paper and moulded pulp.



Cube shaped cardboard option.



used for VIDIYO Bandmates, which were easily pilfered from. 'The sealing of the new LEGO Minifigures box will be more secure than the Bandmates box, which is sealed with labels,' Lukas says. 'The LEGO Minifigures box will be sealed all the way around by a machine making it harder to open. In fact, we had been discussing an easy open function for the LEGO Minifigures box but decided against it based on the learnings from LEGO VIDIYO.'

To get the minifigure elements into this new packaging, the LEGO Group is changing up the packing systems that have been used so far for Collectible Minifigures. If everything goes to plan, the new box will replace the blind bag in September 2023.

Despite the practice of feeling for certain characters being taken into account from the beginning, Lukas and Myra acknowledge they have not retained it in the final packaging design: 'This was a difficult decision, especially as we recognise how the experience of feeling the bag is so significant within the community. However, whilst we need to make this trade-off, we believe it is for the greater good of delivering a more sustainable and functional packaging solution for LEGO Minifigures that hones in on our Planet Promise.' ■

Pillow shaped cardboard option.



The final three designs.



The 'semi-final' version; something very similar is coming next year.

TOP TEN

THE LORD OF THE RINGS SETS

With Middle-earth returning to screens in a new streaming series, Blocks picks out the best sets inspired by The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit

Words: Anthony Walker-Cook Pics: The LEGO Group

10



9473 THE MINES OF MORIA

This set has a cave troll. The set also has five minifigures (Pippin, Boromir, Legolas and two Moria Orcs) that were unique in this set when it was first released. That might be enough to make this a winner, but the model is also made up of a series of individual sections of Balin's tomb, where you can set the members of the Fellowship against the waves of Moria's Orcs. You can hold the gate with Boromir and Gimli, fire arrows from the raised platform with Legolas or be the cause of all the problems with Pippin and accidentally knock the skeleton down the well, signalling to the Orcs that there's someone in the mine who shouldn't be. This is an atmospheric playset, albeit one that's heavy on stickers.



8

9470 SHELOB ATTACKS

Larger spiders in LEGO form can be a bit hit and miss (the awful Aragog in 4738 Hagrid's Hut is more of a miss), but 9470 Shelob Attacks is definitely a hit. Arachnophobes best stay away, as the robust build recreates Shelob's gargantuan dimensions with aplomb, as the spider's superb poseability means there's plenty of fearsome positions you can put this creature into. There's also a great narrative to be told, as both Frodo (the prey) and Sam (the slayer) are included, their diminutive size only amplifying Shelob.

79005 THE WIZARD BATTLE

The second small but interesting set on this list is 79005 The Wizard Battle. Gandalf the Grey has gone to seek the wisdom of his mentor and wizarding elder, Saruman, but not all is as it seems and the two do battle. The commanding Saruman figure is a particular delight, as is the eye of Sauron, which is represented by an orange headpiece. Again selling for £11.99, it's not an especially detailed or exciting build, but there are some fun play features in the set, including a lever to propel a seated Saruman into battle.



6

79015 WITCH-KING BATTLE

It's often thought that exclusive, highly sought after minifigures will only be found in expensive sets. 79015 Witch-King Battle challenges this notion. A stunning, elegant Galadriel minifigure was worth the price of the set alone, but she came alongside a spectral Witch-King and a new version of Elrond dressed in armour and ready for battle. The set cost only £11.99, so the build is unsurprisingly small, but it's designed to be an addition to 79011 Dol Guldur Ambush and 79014 Dol Guldur Battle. It's a brilliant example of how a small set can really contribute to world building.



7

79012 MIRKWOOD ELF ARMY

Although 79012 Mirkwood Elf Army uses 276 pieces, it is essentially a battle pack. Larger and more detailed than the Star Wars battle packs that are a mainstay of the theme, 79012 provides numerous opportunities for play whilst actually functioning properly as an army builder for both the good and bad characters. Included in the set is a magisterial Thranduil – it's a shame he's wearing his robes and not armour, which would be more befitting for the setting – but this austere character comes to life, especially with an imposing hair-crown headpiece. Three other elven warriors are ready to battle two Orcs and the build neatly captures a woodland aesthetic, making it suitable for both display and play purposes.



5

10237 TOWER OF ORTHANC

The largest The Lord of the Rings set is 10237 Tower of Orthanc and while some may have preferred Minas Tirith to be recreated in brick form, the structure is something to behold – the set is 58.2cm tall, to be exact. The magisterial exterior is matched by the detailed interior but the building doesn't stop there – an Ent is included and has a number of characterful details, including a growing mushroom on its foot. Moreover, Saruman the White is in his full wizard robes. A superb, imposing set.



4

79006 THE COUNCIL OF ELROND

If anything's clear from Tolkein's world, it's that you don't have to be big to be mighty. The same may well be said of 79006 The Council of Elrond, which is a relatively small model. Four minifigures, including the elegantly detailed Arwen and Elrond, are present in Rivendell, one of the homes of the elven people. The subtle autumnal aesthetic feels thoroughly built into the small build, which otherwise presents a small piece of Rivendell architecture and the council setting.



3

2

9474 THE BATTLE OF HELM'S DEEP

The climactic battle at the end of 2002's The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers sees the forces of Rohan, bolstered with some elvish support, facing the 10,000-strong army of Uruk Hai. As Isengard's forces are unleashed upon the (supposedly impregnable) Helm's Deep, the good guys employ many methods of repelling the enemy. You could even extend the Deeping wall with 9471 Uruk-hai Army. The Theoden and Haldir minifigures in particular are beautifully detailed. The blocky, cold stonework of Rohan's fortress suits being represented in LEGO form. Forth Eorlingas!



1



79003 AN UNEXPECTED GATHERING

J.R.R. Tolkein's The Hobbit begins 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit' – however, the narrator makes clear that this hole is not dirty or wet, but a homely and comforting one. 79003 An Unexpected Gathering makes this Hobbit hole seem most inviting indeed. From the outside, this is a charming setting with a smart garden; as you go indoors, you find an inviting kitchen space where you can gather Bilbo's Hobbit visitors (the dwarves Balin, Dwalin, Bombur and Bofur as well as Gandalf) around the table. Both The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings start at Bag End, and this is a beautiful, worthy set of such an iconic location.

KAT REES-JAUKE

FAREWELL TO FEEBLING

With the announcement of new Collectible Minifigures packaging, Kat looks back on her days as a feeble master

IT WAS A weekday evening in January 2017 when I found myself in my local supermarket. My mission was simple. I was there to find all of the characters from The LEGO Batman Movie Collectible Minifigures Series 1. As luck would have it, the supermarket had three brand new boxes on display, their contents shiny and calling to my nimble fingers.

It took me about 10 minutes of sitting on the floor, getting odd looks from customers and staff alike, as I feebled out every version of Batman, Robin and the rest of the Gotham gang. And I did it without a single duplicate. My feebling abilities reached expert level, yet it looks like my hard practiced skill is about to become defunct.

What is feebling? For those who haven't collected blind bagged minifigures, or simply use a different terminology, feebling is the art of feeling out minifigures from their blind bags. It's a way to find specific characters from a series and to almost completely ensure you don't get duplicates. I have been feebling for a long time and it certainly takes practice to build up a mental picture of the bricks that you are feeling. It is extremely satisfying to come away with exactly what you are looking for and I have fond memories of some 'ah-ha' moments.

Take the Collectible Minifigures Series 14, which was completely Halloween inspired and is still probably my favourite series to date. I had 15 out of the 16 characters and was only missing Spider Lady. I had trawled through multiple boxes across several stores, looking for the unique roof brick of her dress. It was actually in a Hobbycraft store of all places (the equivalent to Hobby Lobby in the USA) that I finally found her, and she must have been limited to only one or two figures per box. Then there was the time I felt out the different hair pieces between Mr Incredible and Syndrome from the Disney Collectible Minifigures Series 1, as that was the only thing differentiating the two characters who came with practically identical accessories.

Speaking of accessories, my most recent feebling success was with the Marvel Collectible Minifigures. After securing Loki and Sylvie, I had to figure out the Captains. Captain America, Captain Carter and Zombie Captain America all come with LEGO shield elements. The only way to feel the difference between them is using their accessories.



KAT REES-JAUKE

Part of the Blocks review team, Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets.

So, I felt out the 1x1 plates for Captain Carter, the wing elements on Captain America and Zombie Captain America's unique cap mould. All in all it was a very successful trip to Sainsbury's without even picking up the weekly shop.

For several boxes I was even Blocks magazine's

**IT LOOKS LIKE MY
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DEFUNCT**

resident feebler. Boxes of LEGO Collectible Minifigures were sent to me to feel out and label every one. That's anywhere between 36 and 60 packets to feel out, so I would usually do it while watching a film or having an audiobook on – a whole box is no easy task and could take several hours.

Those days are now over as time is ticking on blind bags. Feebling will soon be a skill from a bygone era. The LEGO Group has announced that from next September there will no longer be the foil blind bags that fans have been used to for over a decade. Instead minifigures will be packaged in small boxes, eliminating any way to distinguish the characters.

I know that from an ecological standpoint this is better for the environment. Less plastic in the world is a good thing, especially for our seas. The cardboard still involves cutting down trees, although these boxes will be recyclable.

Not being able to feeble now means that collectors have to completely rethink their strategies. It is frustrating because feebling is what I'm used to, along with almost all other collectors, and it's a shame a paper blind bag or biodegradable plastic one couldn't have worked.

Where does that leave us? For me, there's only one option. I'm now going to be going onto eBay and buying a whole set ready opened and sorted by a LEGO seller. I don't want duplicates and can't do much with an entire box myself, so my minifigure collecting is going to be reduced to one click of a computer button. It's rather sad and is going to feel quite soulless. I'm going to miss explaining to store security that I'm completely normal for feebling minifigures for an hour or more. ■

Feeling packets is on the way out.



Captain Carter, feebled.



There was no drama finding this llama.



Collection complete.



Finding Kermit required some rainbow connection.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

THE SPECIAL PARTS BIN

Something that began in childhood has been part of Daniel's LEGO methodology for decades – but now it's getting retired

MY LITTLE BROTHER, who is seven years younger than me, had reached toddlerhood and with it came a LEGO massacre.

I call it 'the year of destruction'. We shared a room, so despite mamma Konstanski's best efforts, there was no protecting my precious LEGO sets that sat on an old tabletop on the floor. Like some sort of diapered Godzilla, he raged across the room smashing everything in sight the moment no eyes were upon him.

Before long, every one of my beloved sets lay in pieces and no amount of cajoling, correction or discipline could stem the tide. After several rounds of my dad rebuilding everything, only for it to be demolished immediately thereafter, I gave up and accepted the fact that there would be no playing with sets until my kid brother got older. While frustrated at first, at first looking back now I am grateful; having all those bricks available opened up a world of building opportunities that I made good use of and actually started a pattern where I would routinely go through a process dubbed 'liquidating the sets' in order to secure building materials for large projects. This first round, however, was non-voluntary.

About 18 months after the purge, I had two realisations. First, I was ready to play with sets again and, second, my brother had developed enough self-control that it was reasonable to assume he wouldn't smash them. There was, however, a problem. While my collection was certainly not enormous it wasn't small either. The thousands of bricks that had long since been collected into a trio of large bins was overwhelming to 10-year-old Daniel. What to do? Fortunately, my dad had a solution – sorting, and he graciously provided around a dozen boxes for me to use.

Naturally, I began with colour, a much simpler process back in the early 1990s since far fewer hues existed compared to today. I then added a few general categories for parts like wings or transparent windscreens. By this point everything was feeling manageable, but there was still a small collection of elements that didn't fit into any of my categories. Some of them were composite parts, while others had multiple colours in the same piece. I was anxious to get building at this point, so I simply



DANIEL KONSTANSKI

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

tossed them all into the last box and scrawled 'special parts' across its front. The name stuck and so did the category.

Since that first round of re-building, I have developed a personal, and ever more expansive, sorting system for pieces. Through several rounds of liquidating the sets, I noted parts that

THERE WAS A SMALL COLLECTION OF ELEMENTS THAT DIDN'T FIT INTO ANY OF MY CATEGORIES

were annoying to search for. When enough of these were present, they got their own bin, but this also caused expansion of the ever-present special parts bin. It became the catch all for components I only had one or two of, so not enough to justify a full bin, but absolutely didn't want to search through a larger container for.

As an AFOL, liquidating sets is no longer a prerequisite for large projects. After nearly two decades of collecting spare parts I have amassed nearly half a million bricks, which are completely separate from the many bins filled with bags of sets. Along with that change has come a challenge for my special parts bin.

The bin still exists, although not it's a

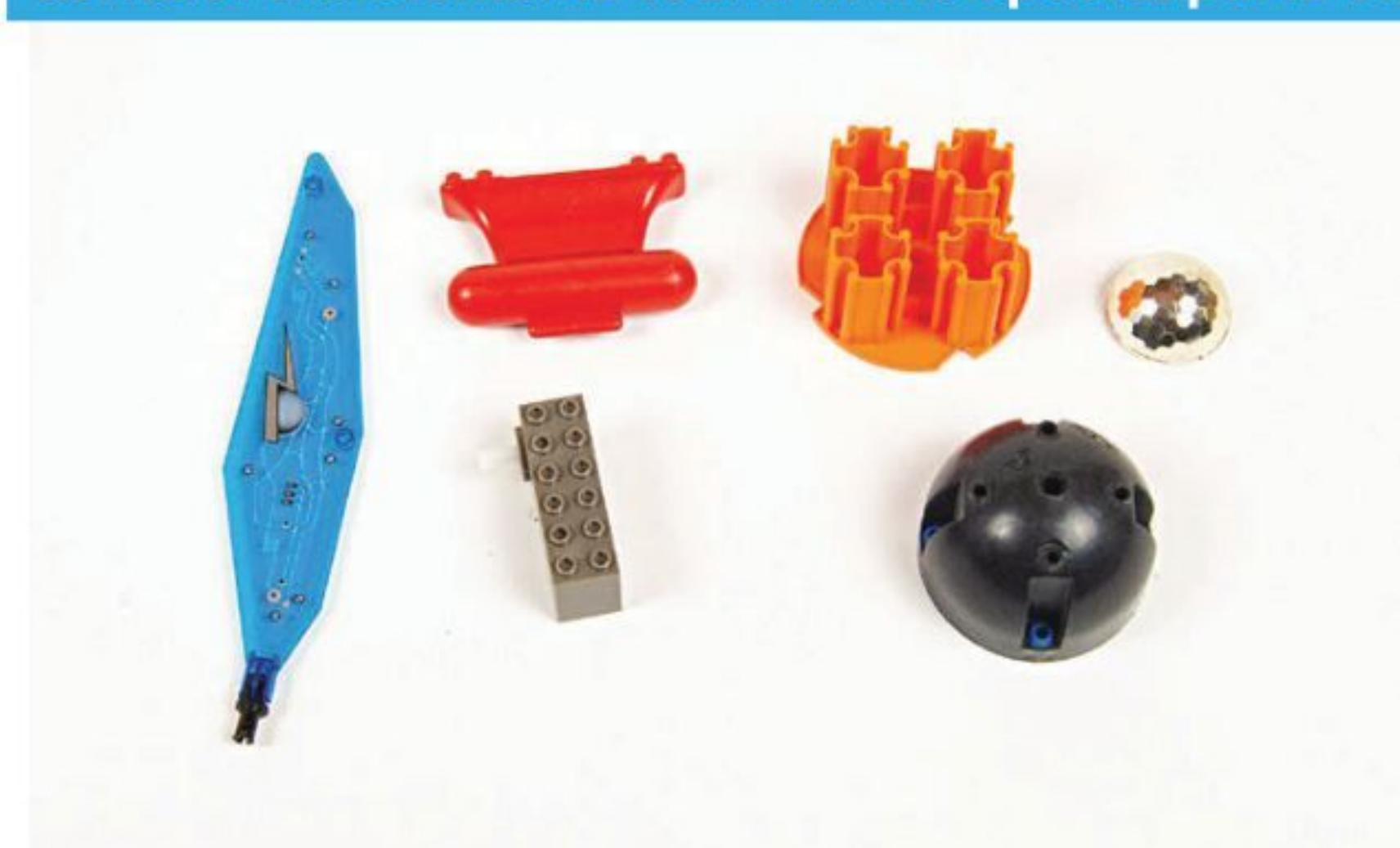
large drawer, but its purpose is somewhat undermined. The idea behind the special parts bin was to quickly locate one-offs while building sets. When following instructions this is straightforward; I knew a rare part when I saw it through sheer experience. However, without a set there is never a reminder of what is in there. I realised the other day that it had been months and perhaps even years since I had used anything in there for a project. It was time for something new, no matter how few of something I had.

My solution was a bunch of small shop drawers used for sorting nails and screws. I spent an afternoon going through the special parts, collecting any that could be grouped together. Some of the mini drawers only got a couple of elements in them but the process itself was a good reminder of some unique parts that I wish I had used on past projects. Next, I need to come up with a labelling system to try and help me remember what is up there – but for now it's already a huge improvement.

The last special parts bin before it was sorted.



Some of the elements found in the special parts bin.



Projects like
Hogwarts require
a well-sorted
collection.



GRAHAM HANCOCK

CASTLE COVER

Graham finds himself working more closely than usual with Phil to make sure the Lion Knights are cover stars

ONE OF the best things about editing Blocks magazine is how unexpected some of the things that happen are. I really never thought I would be on a train with a cow, a couple of horses and a brown frog on a time-sensitive trip.

There was only one set that could go on the cover this month – 10305 Lion Knights' Castle. I was determined that it had to be this set for a few reasons; there hasn't been a 'proper' LEGO castle for years, it's the big 90th anniversary set and it's a beautiful, detailed model that lends itself to a cover shot.

Despite it being the obvious set that everyone would want to see on the cover, there was a slight issue; although the LEGO Group helped us out by getting the model to us before its release, it wasn't really early enough for the deadlines we have to work to. Everything in the magazine is wrapped up and signed off almost a month before you hold it in your hands.

Every day when there was a notification that a package would be arriving, I was rushing to the door, hoping for it to be a ridiculously large box. As time ticked down, I started to get nervous. When putting the magazine together, I – and everyone else on the team – feel a responsibility to our readers. If there's anything within our power that we can do to enhance the magazine, we'll do it. Given that the LEGO Group celebrates the company's anniversary in August (somewhat arbitrarily – there is no specific date for when it was founded, but for the 75th anniversary party a sunny day was desirable), I didn't feel like we could wait a month.

With a few days to spare, I found myself accepting the enormous box from the courier. The dream way to build a set like this is over a couple of weeks, putting a bit more together each evening. Given the time crunch, I didn't have that option, so spent two days constructing the epic model. It was still a pleasure of course, just one with an added layer of pressure.

Once it was built, it had to be carefully packed into a suitcase so that I could jump on a train to visit our photographer, Phil Wrighton, who fortunately is also entirely committed to our readers and was up for shooting the set on a



GRAHAM HANCOCK

A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.

weekend despite having had a very intense work week. I was rewarded at the end of the two-and-a-half-hour journey, because I got to visit Phil's studio and workspace for the first time. Seeing someone else's LEGO collection is always exciting and fascinating.

There was only a little time for admiring Phil's

THERE WAS ONLY ONE SET THAT COULD GO ON THE COVER THIS MONTH

impressive LEGO stash though, because we had a castle to shoot. It's testament to the set's designers that only four pieces fell off during the journey, so there wasn't any significant rebuilding to be done. Often the sets have to go to Phil via a postal service – sometimes he opens the box and finds the model intact, other times he has some building to do before getting the camera out.

This was the first time I'd been there while Phil works his magic; everyone at Blocks magazine works remotely, so very rarely are we in the same place at the same time. Once

the angle for the photograph was decided upon, he then carefully posed each minifigure so that they would have the right level of visibility on the cover. A little bit of Blu Tack helps some of the characters maintain their poses. In addition to the Lion Knights, we made sure to include Majisto and a couple of Forest Guardians.

After some fine tuning, the model was presenting nicely and the minifigures were all in place. Phil shot multiple images with different areas in focus that he'd be able to focus stack, so that the flag at the top of the castle would be as clear as the queen at the front.

Those images went into the computer and were dropped onto a background that balances the bright, clean style of classic LEGO design with the realism that a model this detailed requires. Seeing it all happen in the space of the afternoon was a pleasure for me, as usually I only see work-in-progress pictures along the way and then the end result. There was still more for Phil to do, but that was all digital tweaking to make sure that all of the colours were correct and that the positioning was right.

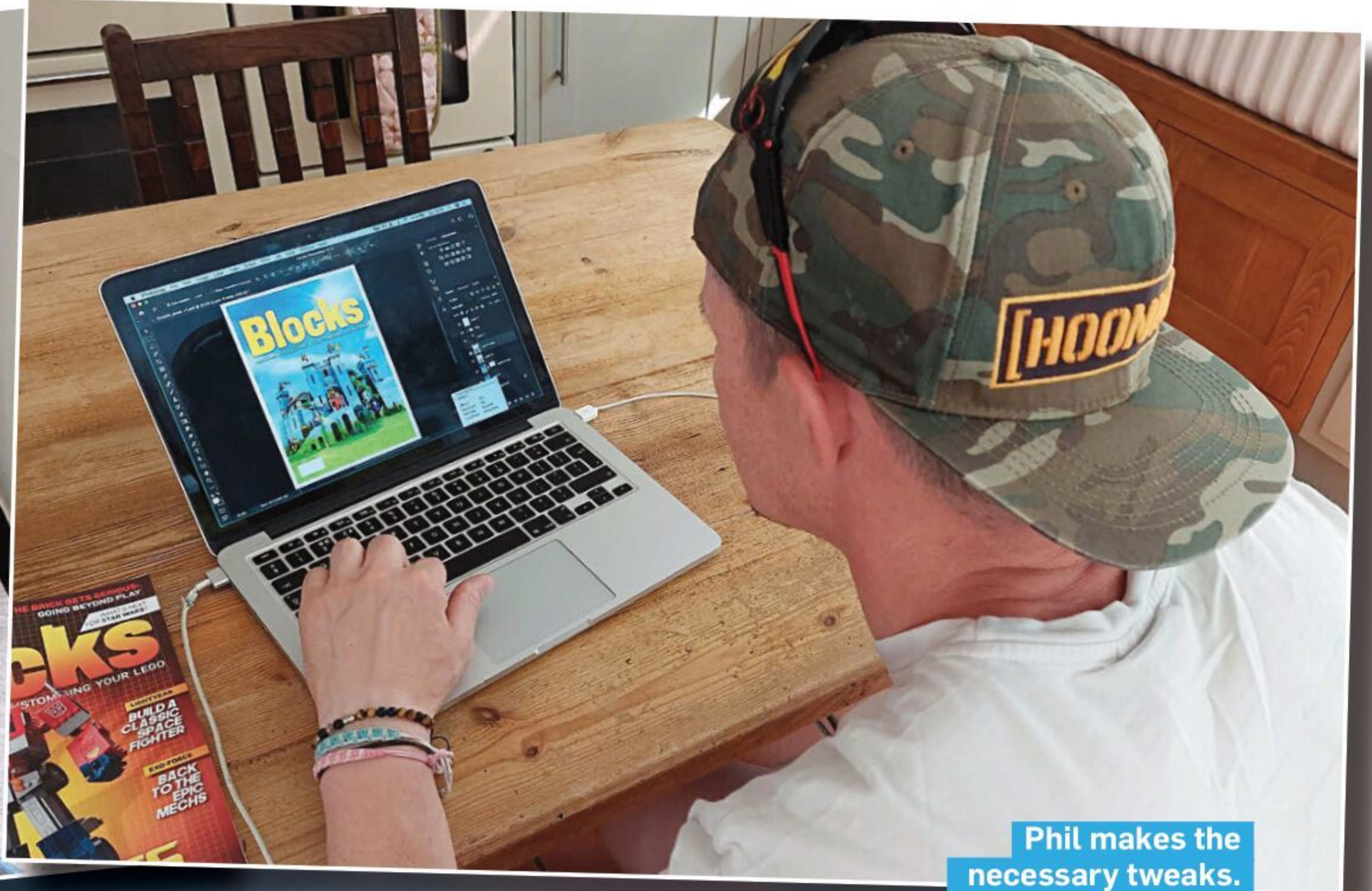
With my part done, I repacked the enormous set and headed back home, relieved that we would be able to have 10305 Lion Knights Castle on the front cover as it deserved to be. Luckily the cover image rarely has to be delivered in such a tight timeframe, but this just happened to be one of those occasions when we needed a fast turnaround. Getting to see Phil go through the process in person was a nice bonus that came out of our necessity for speed and was a great reminder of what everyone puts in every month to deliver the best edition of Blocks magazine we possibly can. ■



Everything is carefully positioned.



Shooting the model.



Phil makes the necessary tweaks.



10305 Lion Knights' Castle.

RETURNING TO CASTLE

Castle is back – and bigger than ever before. Milan Madge and Mike Psiaki tell Blocks magazine how they delivered the ultimate 90th anniversary LEGO set

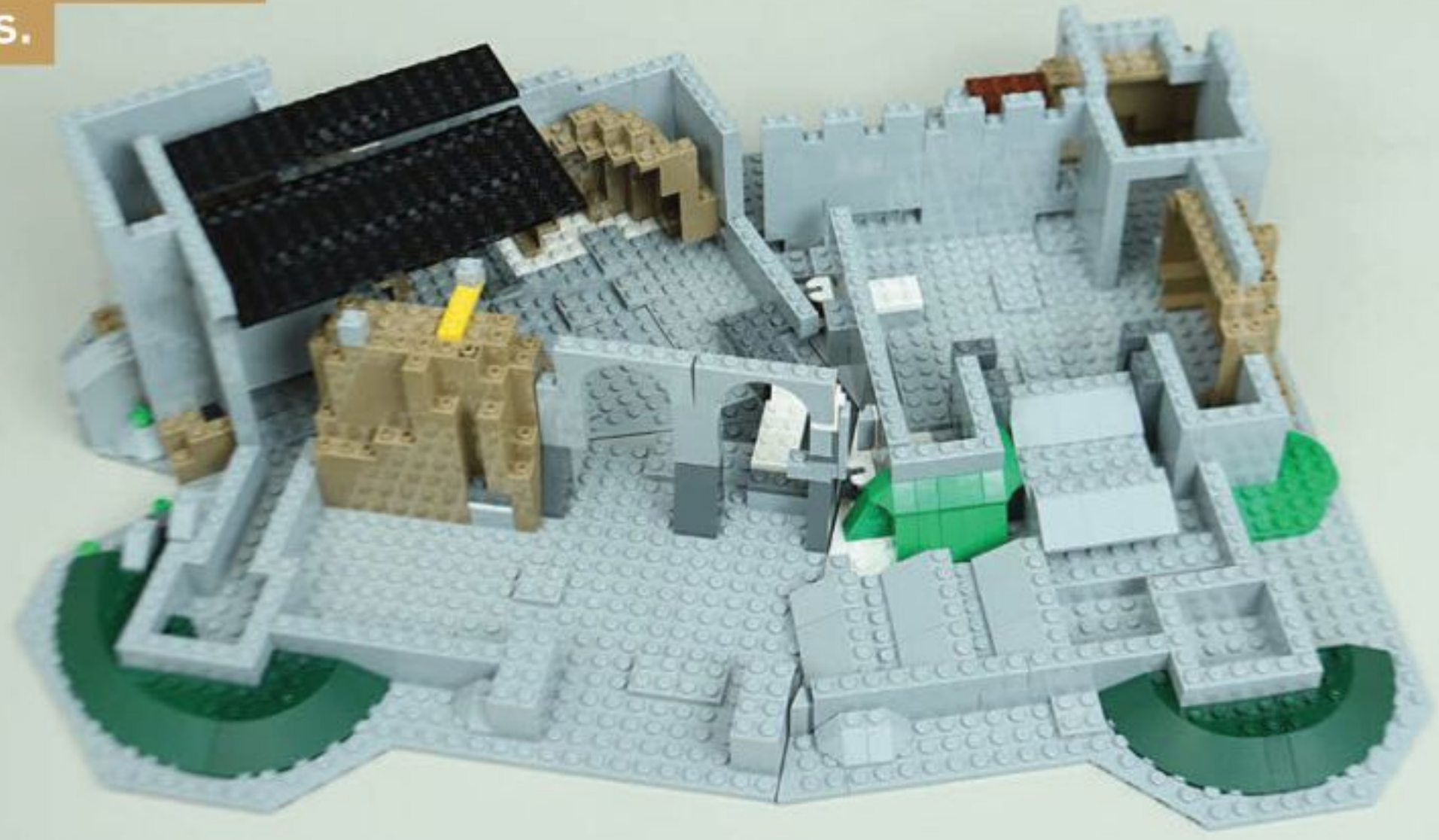
Words: Graham Hancock **Pics:** The LEGO Group, Brickset





Milan Madge,
Mike Psiaki and
their masterpiece.

Exploring layouts for the caverns.



A sketch of the castle layout.

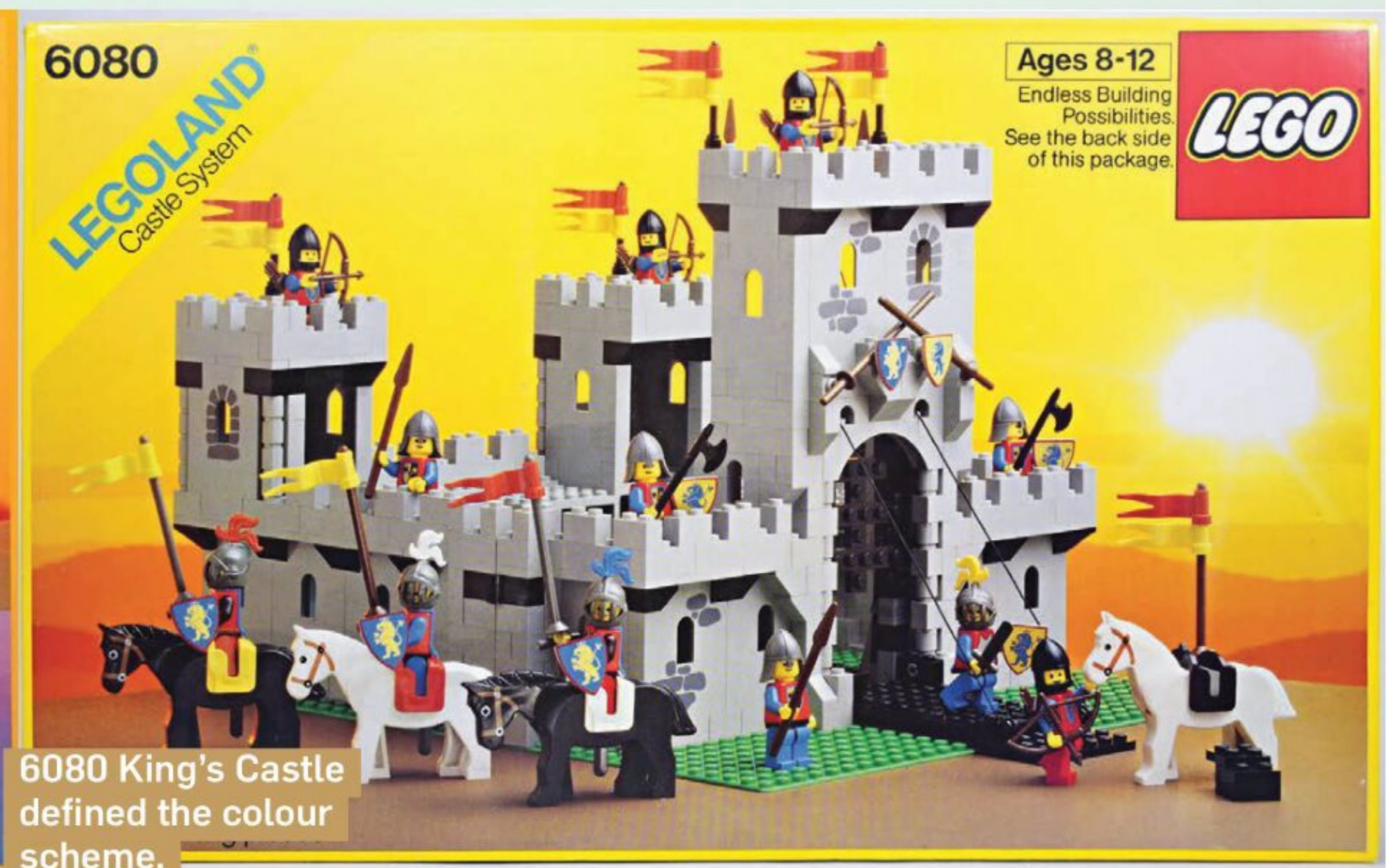


6066 Camouflaged Outpost inspired the model.

A concept model without the elevation.



6086 Black Knights' Castle was a key influence.



6080 King's Castle defined the colour scheme.

WHEN MODEL DESIGNER Milan Madge and Design Master Mike Psiaki sit down, they are visibly delighted to be talking about 10305 Lion Knights' Castle – and with good reason. Castle ran for more than 30 years, with that longevity meaning that it touched a great many childhoods. For the 90th anniversary of the LEGO Group, fans had the opportunity to vote for their favourite LEGO theme – and the votes poured in for Castle. That desire led to the enormous model that Milan and Mike have created, a set that offers adults a classic castle but at a size relevant to their larger hands.

One thing that Mike wants to make clear from the off though is that the duo won't be revealing any of the Easter eggs found within the set. Whether he's going to be asked about Easter eggs or not, he absolutely, definitely, under no circumstances, will be revealing any Easter eggs at all. Not one.

It makes sense, as part of the joy of building a set like this is discovering these secrets for yourself through the building. Particularly in these nostalgia-based models, those moments are even more special. Like 2020's 21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay, this set feels like a tribute to classic LEGO sets, from the yellow-bordered box that it comes in, through the familiar colour scheme, to the updated versions of vintage minifigures that populate it.

'Our starting point was that we're going to do a set that celebrates LEGO castles, specifically something related to Lion Knights, Black Falcons and Forestmen – those three clans are going to be involved,' says Mike. 'We did a lot of exploration. Is it a Black Falcon castle? Is it a complete redo of an old castle just in a bigger style? Is it a Forestmen hideout? We built a lot of different stuff, there was a lot of very blue sky thinking and building. That was not very refined stuff, we would build half a thing and we would look at it and be like, "no, that's not so good," or we would be like, "wow, I can see that this would be cool and I don't need to build anymore."

'The more we explored, we realised all of these things are cool. But the thing that we were missing is that first we need a castle. We need a big awesome castle, then who knows what will come next.' Mike is keen

not to raise expectations though; just because they were thinking about different options, there are no promises that any of those ideas will ever be developed further. 'I'm not saying there's anything more coming – do not misread me.'

Once they had settled on a castle, that didn't mean that the decision-making process was over. With decades of Castle sets to draw from, there was plenty more to think about. 'We explored actually making different colours on the castle,' says Milan. 'We looked at the Yellow Castle and then we looked at if we updated that – should it be tan? What's the level of realism we're going for? We looked at the Black Knights' Castle, what if we did black? What if we did dark grey? We decided that Castle has been away for so long a classic grey castle is what people are missing. That was the icon that we should be going for. Obviously, it's in the new grey though.'

'If we'd released a grey castle two years ago, then we might consider something different for this one,' Mike adds. 'But since we've never really done such an enormous castle, we thought let's go very traditional in the colours.'

Since the announcement of the set, fans have looked to the obvious influence of 6080

King's Castle and 6081 King's Mountain Fortress, as both are grey and both belong to the Lion Knights. In actuality though, the designers went back to every LEGO castle to examine what they could draw from and pay homage to.

'The King's Castle from the Lion Knights faction is the kind of aesthetic that we were going for,' says Milan. 'But I would say it doesn't really have a huge amount in common with that castle in terms of the play of it. We were discussing what the best LEGO castle was – and we weren't really sure if there was a correct answer to it. But weirdly, both of us remember [6086] Black Knights' Castle as being the castle that we dreamed of having and neither of us did. For us that was the coolest one, it had the raised base plate with the bridge being higher and the little secret entrance at the back, the Wolfpack guy hidden away.'

'When you look at the Black Knights' Castle next to the new Lion Knights' Castle, even though they're strikingly different, a lot of the cues

WE'RE GOING TO DO A SET THAT CELEBRATES LEGO CASTLES



Daniel Krentz started it all with 375.

are there; we built up the landscape so the bridge can be higher, there's the little secret gates at the back.'

Putting the Lion Knights front and centre was a direct result of fan input. To determine what LEGO set would be the big 90th anniversary model, fans could vote on LEGO Ideas for their favourite theme to be brought back. Castle fans were frustrated that the broad theme was split into subthemes, splitting the vote for the medieval world.

While the LEGO Group considered that a mistake and consolidated the votes, the learnings were useful to the designers – Lion Knights and Forestmen were the two most popular subthemes. Using the historical symbol of bravery, the Lion Knights had a decent run from 1984 to 1990, then inspired the Royal Knights introduced in 1995. As for the Forestmen, the Robin Hood influenced band of merry minifigures only had a smattering of sets between 1987 and 1990, but still made a big impact.

The Lion Knights were the obvious occupants of the castle, but those green-clad outlaws would also be present in the set. 'We also talked about [6066] Camouflaged Outpost, with the hidden cave and stuff, that was a set that we both had as kids,' says Milan. 'That was something that we were both really excited about when we actually started working on the

project – in our exploration we started building a big Forestmen hideout, like a UCS (Ultimate Collector Series) forest thing.'

The many sources of inspiration highlight how different 10305 Lion Knights' Castle is from 21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay and 10497 Galaxy Explorer, which both stick quite closely to specific sets from their respective themes. Once Milan and Mike had settled on a grey castle with influences from across the Castle theme, they then needed to figure out the balance between offering a sophisticated, modern building experience

and replicating the clean, simplistic design of sets from the 1980s and 1990s.

'We were doing a lot of exploration on how you build the castle walls,' says Milan. 'Should it be lots of greebling? Should it be specific textures? How are we going to achieve that? We did a lot of really detailed walls on the big square

castle and though it looked great – and a lot of fans probably would have loved it – it didn't capture the essence of LEGO Castle, it was missing something that made you feel like it was a 1980s castle.

'So we started looking at if it was built with stacked LEGO brick walls like a proper 1980s castle. We added the dynamism in through the different angles and to get the shadows looking interesting and spice it up that way, instead of changing how we build the structure of the model.'

THERE ARE EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS AND STORY STARTERS THAT YOU WILL REMEMBER FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD

The castle is at an unprecedented size.



'We see a lot of fan creations where people go absolutely off the rails and the way they build brick is super cool,' Mike elaborates. 'But as a building experience that we're supposed to make instructions for and someone is supposed to follow along with, it just really wasn't working. We were just putting so much of the model into building these walls and we felt like that's actually not what LEGO Castle is about. We wanted to make the majority of the experience of building feel like what you would remember from when you were a child.'

'The addition was the extra twist that now you're building the wall at an angle. That part is quite minimal, because you just start with this one weird thing. But then all the while you're building up, you realise, "this is what I used to do when I was a kid, this is how I built my castles," but just putting that one small twist to it. Whereas if we built a straight wall full of crazy detail, the experience of putting it together just becomes so boring and different. And that's not what we wanted to do.'

'That's actually something that we learned from the Pirates of Barracuda Bay set,' Milan adds. 'We got a lot of feedback from people saying that they felt like they were back in 1989. We'd had different versions of it at first where the base was all built out of Technic or built

sideways. Then we ended up with just some big plates and just built with the standard pieces, the building style of that seemed to work really well.'

Classic brick building is one way that childhood memories are imbued in the model. Another is by incorporating classic elements, such as the rope ladder, the shields and the Forest Guardians hats. 'You'll notice there are some caves with bats in and things like that. There are emotional triggers and story starters that you will remember from LEGO models from your childhood rather than the more complex building methods we often use today.'

One thing that definitely differentiates this model from the castles fans had as children is that it's bigger. In 1992, 6086 Black Knight's Castle felt enormous at 588 pieces. This set is 4,514 pieces and may end up covering your dining table. 'This was as small as we can possibly

make it,' Mike laughs.

'We essentially made a list of everything that you would expect to be in a LEGO castle, having not had a castle in so many years,' Milan says. 'What do we need to deliver on in order to make this the appropriate homage to LEGO Castle? And we struggled to get it much smaller, with all of that stuff in it.'

'The horse with the knight on top dictates how tall the gate has to be

WE STARTED LOOKING AT IF IT WAS BUILT WITH STACKED LEGO BRICK WALLS LIKE A PROPER 1980S CASTLE



A classic box style for a modern model.

It opens up, just like classic Castle sets.



The Forest Guardians have a way in.



Castle life is in full swing.



because the knight has to go through the gate. But then that scales the entire gate house, which has to be big enough to contain the gate and then the mechanism for the portcullis and the drawbridge. And then that compounds into how tall the walls need to be. So the whole thing kind of grows from that one aspect. Niels Milan Pederson, who designed the King's Castle and the Black Knights' Castle, he designed the horse – so the size of this castle was dictated by Niels 40 years ago.'

Of course, the size of the castle also dictated the size of everything around it in the model including the tree that appeals to the Forest Guardians. They are woven into the new model in a clever way that feels authentic to those origins.

'The Forestmen hideout started as a tree and then as the castle got bigger, the tree grew taller and taller. And every time we found a little bit of space inside the castle that wasn't being used we tried to carve it out and make more room for the forest stuff,' says Milan.

'We didn't have their hideout at the start,' Mike adds. 'But then when the castle was going to be up on landscape, then I was like, "oh, well, the tree's there, we can have a little door there to their hideout." The areas for the Forest People kept growing – our initial versions of the model built up on this landscape just had hollow space underneath. We thought maybe we could do something with it, we realised if we just moved the supports then there's actually some space that we can have a little passage in, then it just grew into almost a network of caves.'

'When the model was done, we reflected on it and realised that there is almost no wasted space,' says Milan. 'Often in a LEGO set you have areas that are purely structural. In this model, we figured out that we had one space that's four modules wide – and that's the only space in the entire LEGO set where there isn't some sort of play feature.'

For the designers, who have to deliver finished models at certain sizes and with certain constraints, realising they had not wasted any bricks must

have been a satisfying feeling.

'The thing that I'm most happy with is the drawbridge we did,' says Milan, reflecting further on this nostalgia-filled castle. 'In all of the original castles, the drawbridge is just hinged by a pivot at the back and it has two chains to hinge it up. Often the drawbridge is directly on the table surface that you're playing. When we started raising ours up onto landscape we started looking at incorporating a more interesting type of drawbridge. We used a counterweight one where all the chains and the mechanism are buried in the walls, so the drawbridge is counterweighted to close when you lower the chains, which you see in a lot of medieval castles. For me it was really cool that we could do something historical, that the LEGO Group has never done before.'

Mike's favourite little touch is a personal one. 'On the back of the gate house section, there are slots in the wall where you can drop rocks down on intruders. That was something that my brothers and I always tried to build into our castles that we would make when we were kids. It's just fun to be able to make that a detail in an official LEGO castle.'

Despite all of his protestations, the Design Master gets caught up in talking about a minifigure highlight in the set... and gives away an Easter egg. Perhaps the joy of talking about such a unique project has overridden his golden rule.

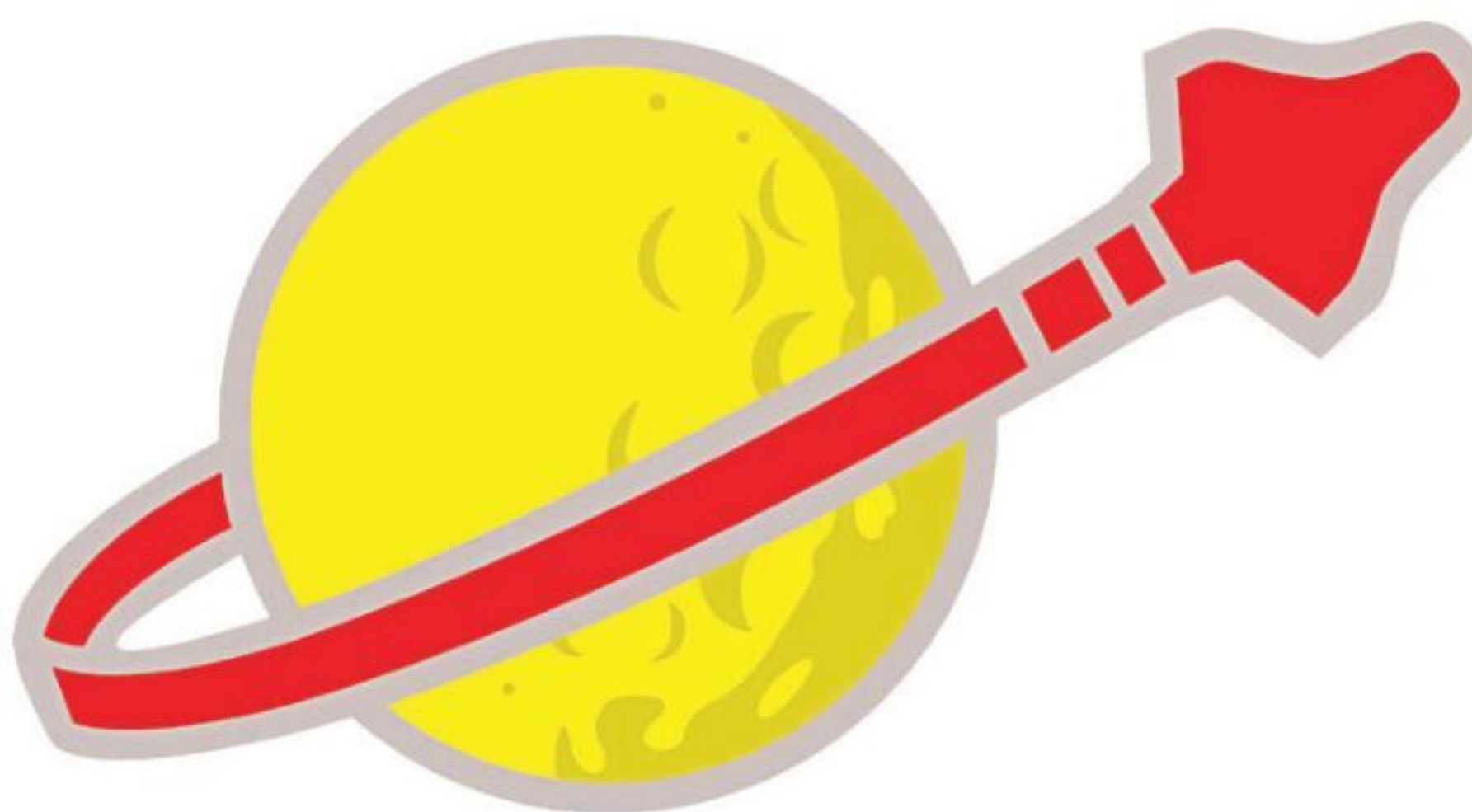
'I'm so happy that we were able to bring back the wizard Majisto,' Mike says. 'He will be narrating the building experience for you as you build the castle. He speaks in the third person up until bag 16 where you actually build him and then he takes physical form, he recognises that he's taken physical form and starts speaking in the first person again. So that was the nerdy detail level that we went to.'

And those are the nerdy details that fans will be delighted to discover more of for themselves as they rebuild their childhood. Castle is back. ■

■ THERE IS ALMOST NO WASTED SPACE ■



There's a full cast to populate the model.



CLASSIC SPACE

In 1979, the LEGO Group blasted off to explore the universe with a range of Space sets that combined superb swooshability with the spirit of scientific endeavour

Words: Andrew Webb **Pics:** The LEGO Group, Brickset

THE LAUNCH OF 10497 Galaxy Explorer celebrates one of the most iconic LEGO sets ever made, 497 Galaxy Explorer (known in Europe as 928 Space Cruiser and Moonbase). Even though the theme launched 44 years ago, it still has a hold on the heart of children who were enamoured with the blue, grey and yellow models.

When Space arrived, it was one of three play themes built around the newly developed minifigure. Castle represented the past and Town the present, whereas Space offered all things futuristic. As a child, you couldn't grow up to be a knight, the various jobs in Town were what your parents did, but Space was packed with promise – almost every child wanted to be an astronaut and fly beyond our atmosphere.

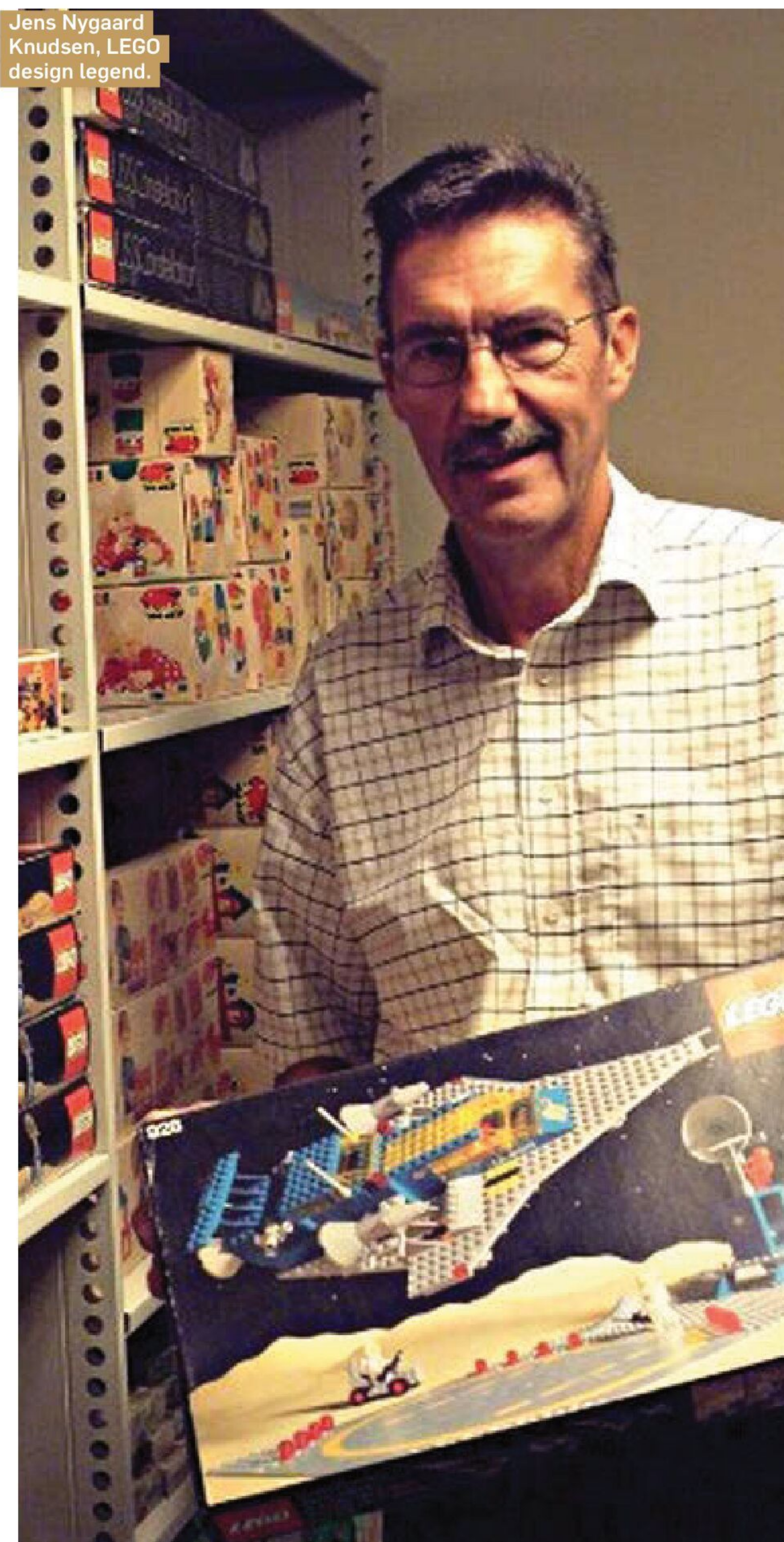
A few Classic Space sets were rushed into American stores in 1978, more than six months before originally planned, to steal a lead against rival construction toy companies. The next year, the entire Space range debuted at the 1979 Nuremberg Toy Fair – which also saw the launch of the Rubik's Cube – to great success, winning the award for European Toy of the Year. The development of the sets had been led by the late legendary LEGO talent Jens Nygaard Knudsen, who designed many of those initial models himself.

It was themes like Space that cemented the LEGO Group's reputation for a lack of editorial narrative. There were no character names or canon to its core products back then, going against the grain of many other toys in the 1970s and 1980s. There was just enough of a hint to ground this perhaps in our solar system, but it could, with a little imagination, be anywhere in the universe. And that's the point. It was up to the child to build out their own backstory around whatever they could imagine.

Part of the charm of the original 1978 – 1987 Classic Space run was that it wasn't science fiction from a distant galaxy filled with aliens and monsters, but rather what cultural commentators call 'near future science fiction'; a practical world of rockets, resource collecting, cargo transport, research probes, surface exploration and communication arrays. In short, all the real-world things humanity is doing and going to have to do to live and work in space.

You can see this in the names of some of the sets; Uranium Search Vehicle, Interplanetary Shuttle and Mobile Tracking Station. Confusingly, many sets produced for the US market were given not just different names but also set numbers, which leads to anomalies like 497 containing the famous LL928 brick (the LL stands for LEGOLAND). Of course as children, Classic Space fans based in the US didn't give it a second thought, not knowing that the set had another number in other countries.

Towards the end of the 1980s the names got a little whacky and less based on science or practical usage. Alliteration began creeping in with sets such as Strata Scooter, Crater Crawler, Cosmic Comet, as well as the likes of Walking Astro Grappler and Alien Moon Stalker.



Jens Nygaard Knudsen, LEGO design legend.

THE SETS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Looking at the original 1978 to 1987 run of classic sets, they broadly fit into one of five categories; transport (rovers, scooters, scouts, transporters, cruisers & capital ships), resource (diggers, buggies, dozers, prospectors), rocket and probe launch (both bases and vehicles), command and communication (radar, and oddly sonar), and robots (both as minifigure companions and builds in themselves).

Removing US duplicates (and merging the flat baseplate and crater versions of 926) as well as minifigure packs, base plates and unreleased or exclusive regional sets, there is a grand total of 74 main theme sets.

Of the 74, transport vehicles and ships make up by far the most, some 48 sets, and have the greatest range of size. 886 Space Buggy from 1979 has just 20 pieces, and if you take out the figure and utensil tool, the buggy itself is made from just 13 elements. Even with just those few pieces, the back of the box shows three alternate builds – two more vehicle configurations and a fixed science workstation. At the other end of the scale is 1983's behemoth 6980 Galaxy Commander, with an eye-watering – for the time – 412 parts. Fully assembled it didn't even fit on the single supplied landing pad base board, but rather hung over the

edges.

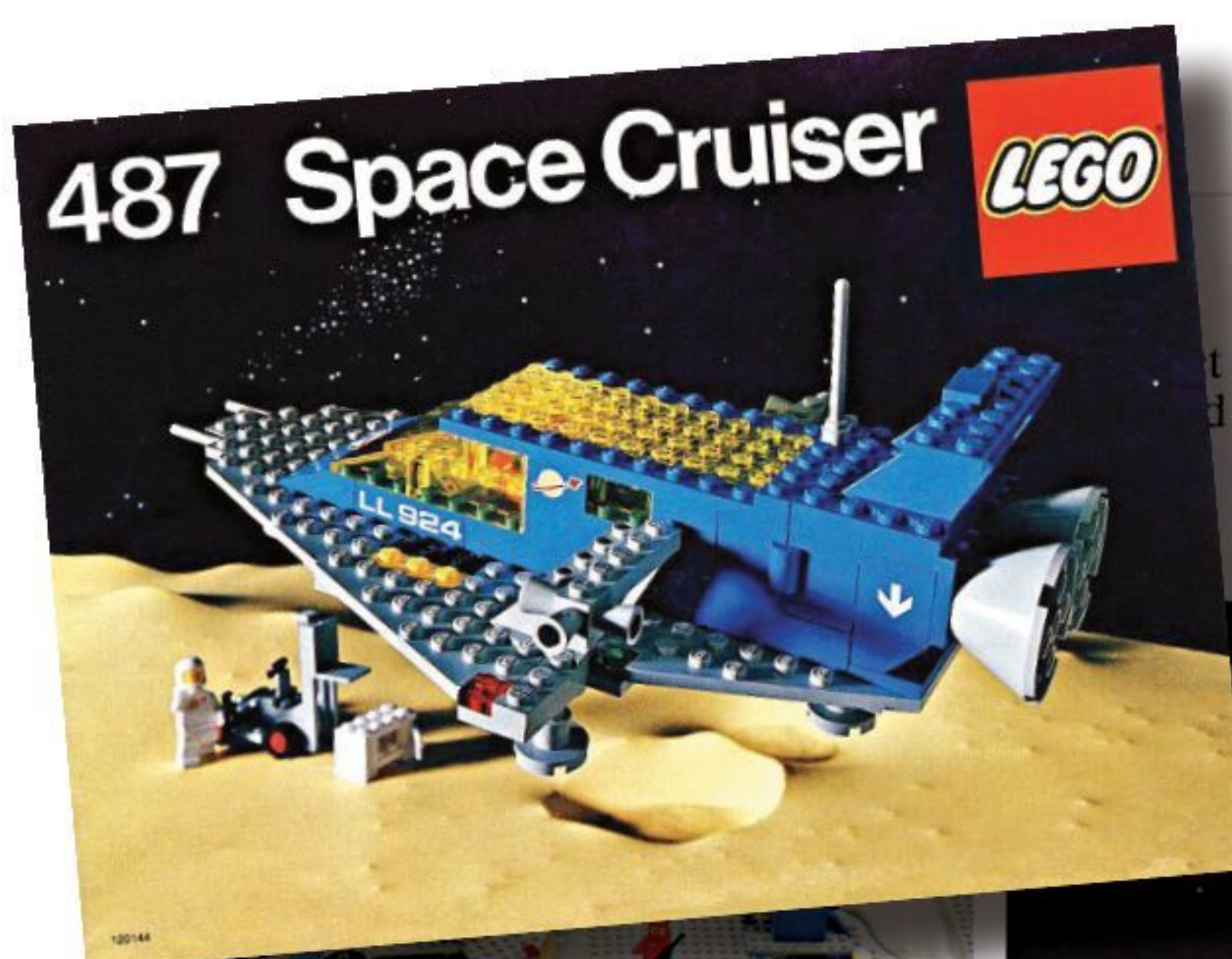
Then there are nine resource vehicles; great value pocket money sets and workhorses of the range such as 6841 Mineral Detector and 6847 Space Dozer, as well as the superb 6930 Space Supply Station base. Seven sets are devoted to rockets, both in base and vehicle form, of which 6950 Mobile Rocket Launcher is a great example with lots of play functionality. Interestingly many rocket sets come with a satellite, yet due to the size

there's no way it can fit inside the nose cone, and so it's often found perched on top. In fact the only rocket set to have any internal payload potential was 6972 Polaris I Space Lab, which manages to squeeze a minifigure into a widened out central space.

Next there are the six communications and command sets, including 6970 Beta

I Command Base and the highly collectible Mobile Tracking Tracking Station. Finally, four sets feature robots, including 1498 Spy Bot and the frankly bizarre 6951 Robot Command Centre. To get a sense of just how far LEGO robot and mech builds have come in the past 40 years, take a look back at 6951. Top heavy, no articulation of limbs... in fact barely any limbs at all. 6951 is one of the few Classic Space sets that many fans admit to being a bit of a dud (although it also has its admirers).

SPACE WAS PACKED WITH PROMISE – ALMOST EVERY CHILD WANTED TO BE AN ASTRONAUT



928
*New! Space cruiser and moonbase



926
*New! Command centre



885
*New! Space scooter



886
*New! Space buggy



889
*New! Radar truck



891
*New! Two seater space scooter



894
*New! Mobile signals centre



897
*New! Mobile rocket launcher



918
*New! One man space ship



305
*New! Lunar baseplates

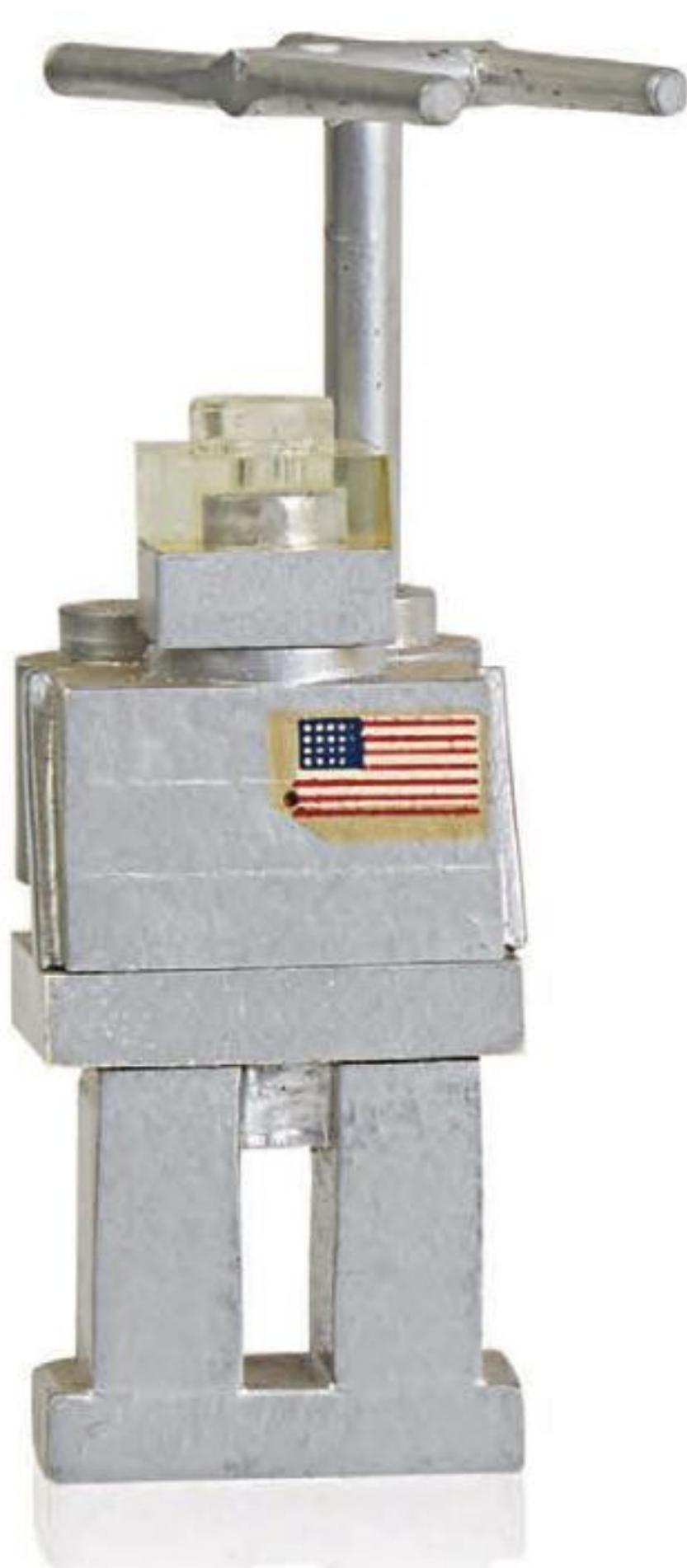


306
*New! Landing strip/roadway

LEGOLAND Space

You can build your own planet with the new baseplates. And with the Space Ships, Rockets, and Radar Vehicles, you can go exploring far, far out in space.

918, 924 and 928 (497) are a similar idea at different sizes.



Early prototypes and the final design for the Space minifigure.

FROM POCKET MONEY SETS TO PARENTAL PRESENTS

Classic Space sets varied in size from small pocket money sets to larger sets that were aimed at the Christmas and birthday gift market. This is crucial to the success of any toy range and allows children to collect all year round.

The LEGO Group offered pretty much the same set at several price points. Looking at the theme's best-known ships – 918, 924 and 928 – they're very similar in design just at different sizes – essentially a small, medium and large version. They all still perform the cargo transporting function. 10497 Galaxy Explorer takes full advantage of this, offering the opportunity to build the model at any of the three sizes.

Similarly, compare the 1979 launch set 462/897 Mobile Rocket Launcher (79 pieces) with 483 Alpha-1 Rocket Base (183 pieces) from the same year. The actual rocket in both sets is roughly the same size (483 has one extra 2x2 with axle hole). But the scale and scope of each set are radically different. Rocket-themed ships still got the budget treatment later in the series with 1986's 26-piece 6802 Space Probe, which featured a rocket so small it looks like it'd barely achieve escape velocity.

Communications sets also get this treatment; from the tiny 29-piece 889 Radar Truck, through the highly sought after 78-piece 452 Mobile Ground Tracking Station, right up to 926 Space Command Centre, all bristling with dishes and antennae. Offering essentially the same set

across different price points meant that children could have broadly similar experiences whatever their family budget. While altruistic, it also made commercial sense.

Later sets from the mid-1980s often combined several modular units into one build attached using a Technic pin, so a part might detach to become a flyer, while another section could remain as the base. This allowed for more imaginative play within a single set. 6940 Alien Moon Stalker for example has a detachable shuttle head and tail unit, as well as launchable rockets from the middle section.

THE LEGO GROUP OFFERED PRETTY MUCH THE SAME SET AT SEVERAL PRICE POINTS

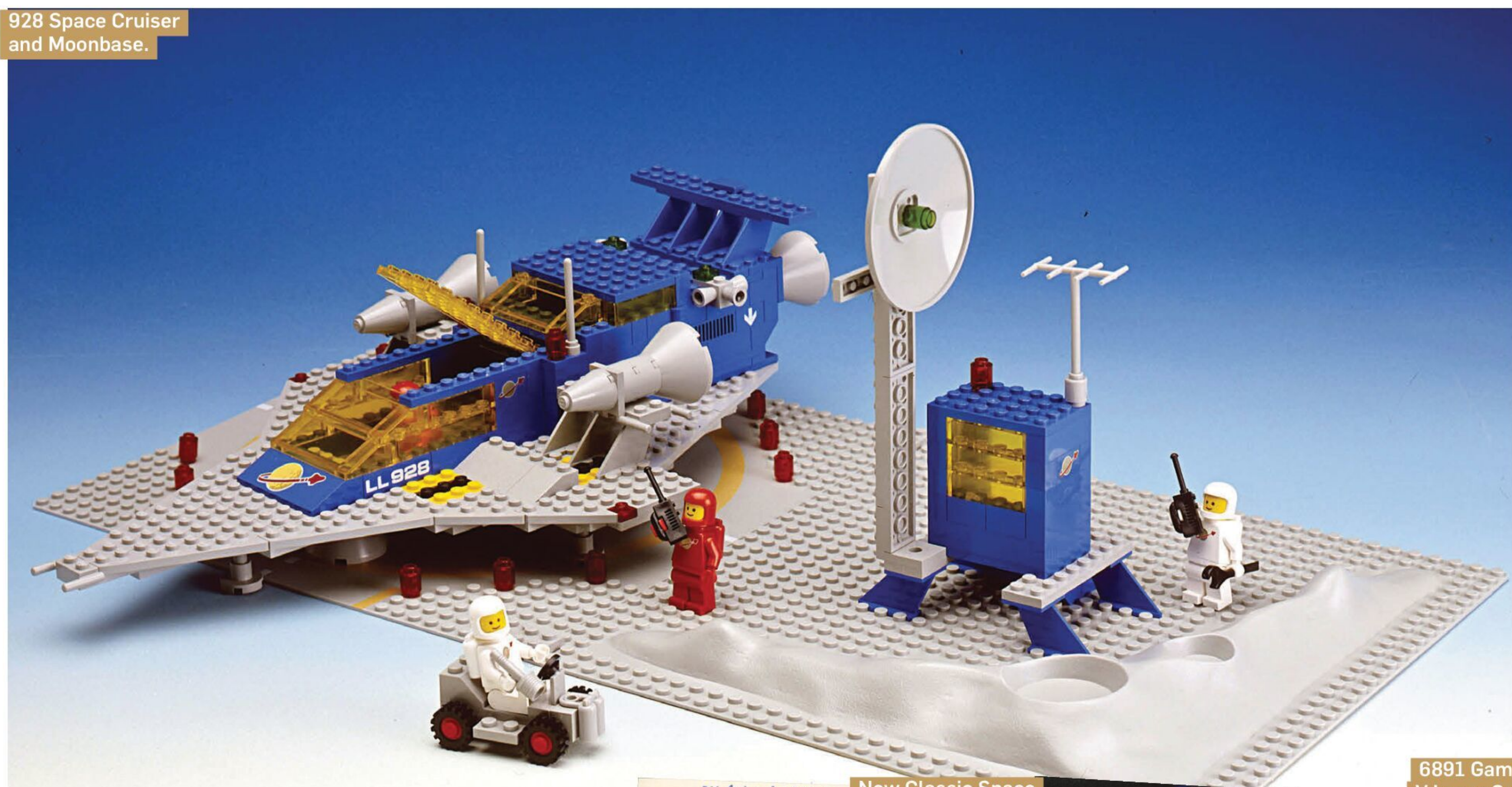
THE MINIFIGURES

The original sets featured astronauts with white suits, and others with red suits – while it was never stated in the product packaging or marketing, the thinking behind the colour choice was influenced by Cold War geopolitics. As later coloured suits were

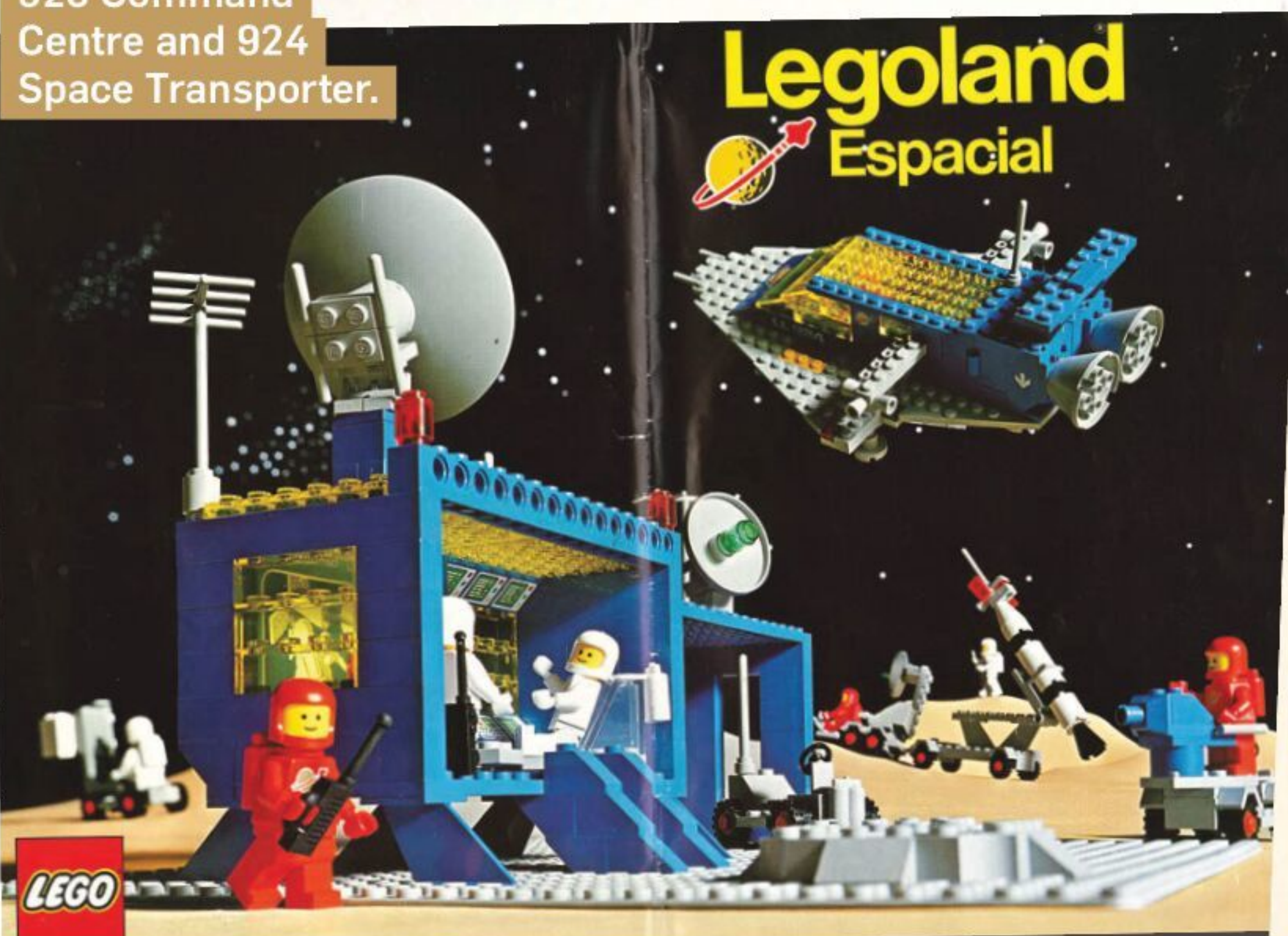
added, the narrative seemed to shift to colours signifying Star Trek-style roles, with Jens saying some years later: 'the original two colours were explorers, yellow were scientists, blues were technicians or mechanics and I guess the black were warriors, but we were not allowed to make a big deal out of this. We were not allowed to make war.' Not emphasising conflict was a directive from Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, the LEGO Group's second-generation owner.

'It was difficult at the time to make bricks in new colours or to make new elements,' Jens said. 'The helmet had to work in Space, Castle and Town

928 Space Cruiser and Moonbase.



926 Command Centre and 924 Space Transporter.



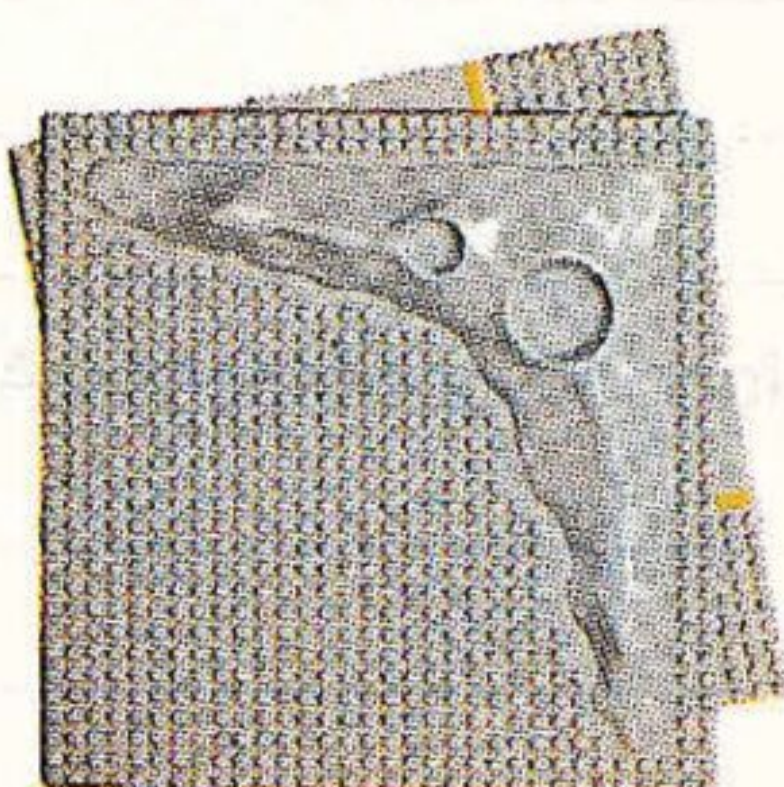
New Classic Space sets were released for nine years.



LEGOLAND®

6951 Robot
Command Centre is
an unusual model.

Ohne unseren neuen Raum-Roboter wären wir verloren.



Jetzt gibt es viele neue und spannende
Modelle für Deine Abenteuer im Weltraum.
Hol sie Dir und starte zum
Entdeckungsflug in neue Welten!

LEGOLAND® Space.
Als ob Du auf einem anderen Planeten leben würdest.
Für Kinder von 5 bis 12 Jahren.



® LEGO und LEGOLAND sind eingetragene Warenzeichen. © 1984 LEGO Spielwaren AG, 6340 Baar.

The clean design has retained its appeal.

Black astronauts may have been warriors.



The green astronaut arrived later in 21109 Exo-Suit.



The colours from the original run.



for example.' This has led to the 'grey astronaut' hack by combining the torso of Rocket Boy, from Series 17 of Collectible Minifigures, with a set of regular Classic Space air tanks, grey legs and a grey helmet. The helmet is the tricky part; original 1970s grey helmets appeared in only three sets and are very expensive. A cheaper method is to use a more modern helmet from Collectible Minifigures Series 9 Battle Knight.

Green Space minifigures made their debut in 2014's LEGO Ideas 21109 Exo-Suit set, and orange in 2020 on the cover of LEGO Minifigure: A Visual History New Edition. Finally, another mix-and-match approach is the purple astronaut, made using another Collectible Minifigures torso and a purple helmet from 2004, though the classic air tanks element has never been made in purple, so it's not an entirely complete astronaut.

THAT'S NOT A BLASTER, IT'S A LOUDHAILER

The LEGO Group has a long-standing philosophy of not putting real world weapons in sets, only historical or fantastical ones. Back in the 1970s and 1980s this rule was more strongly enforced than today, so the minifigures were equipped with walkie-talkies, spanners and metal detectors. Reversing parts like 4349 Loudhailer and 3959 Torch allows them to become, with enough imagination, blasters; and every child used 4360 Utensil Camera with Side Sight as a space bazooka.

The same rule applied to the ships, where elements were just ambiguous enough to be either thrusters, or actual detachable rockets and missiles. And nearly every ship in the fleet sported 3839a 1x2 Plate with

Handlebars at the front which were, of course, lasers in every child's eyes. Jen very much endorsed this approach: 'We were not allowed to make weapons, and the aerals and other elements that pointed forwards on the spaceships looked too aggressive. Instead we added a lot of radar dishes and sensor probes, but to us they were really guns.'

IT'S A SHAME ABOUT GREY

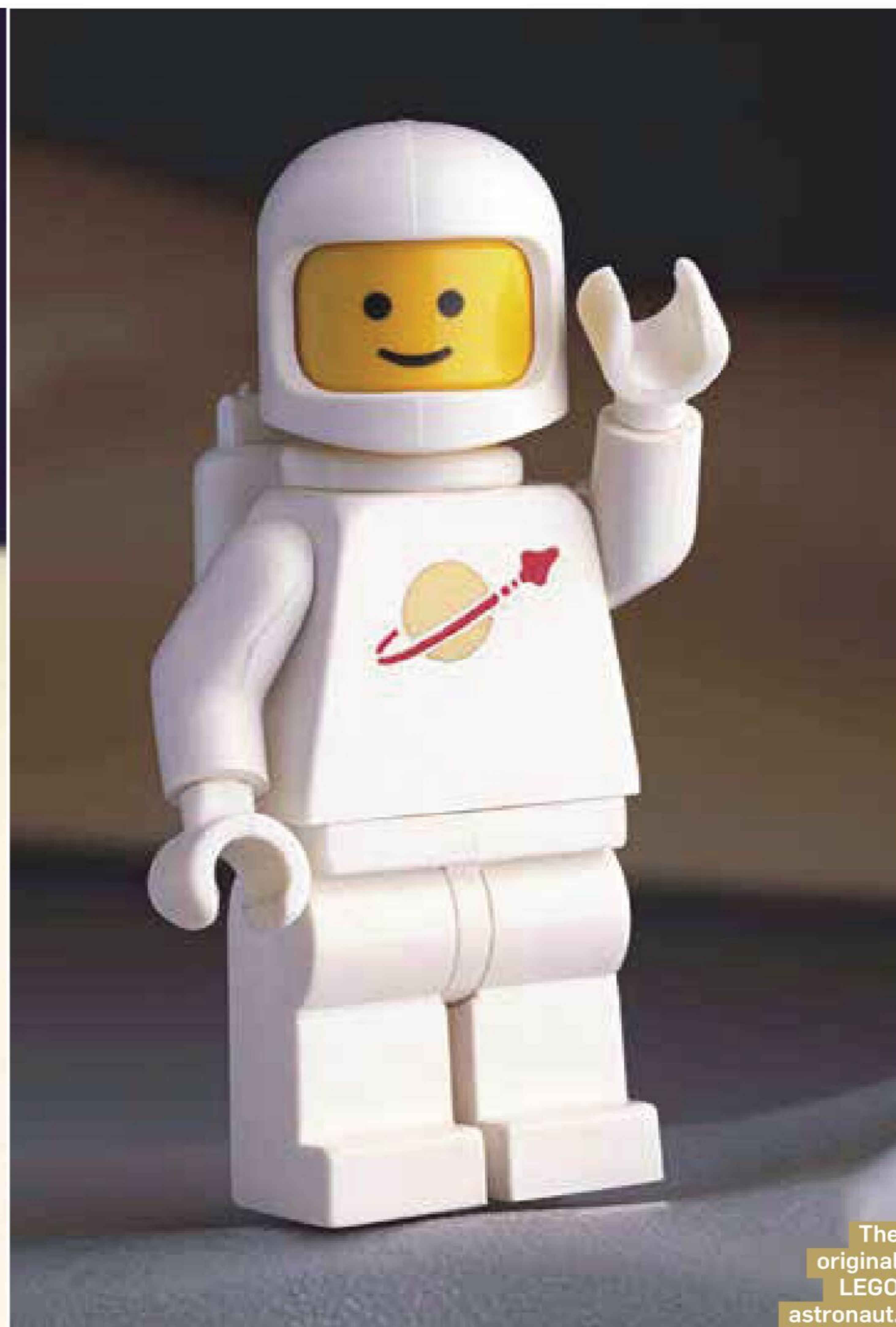
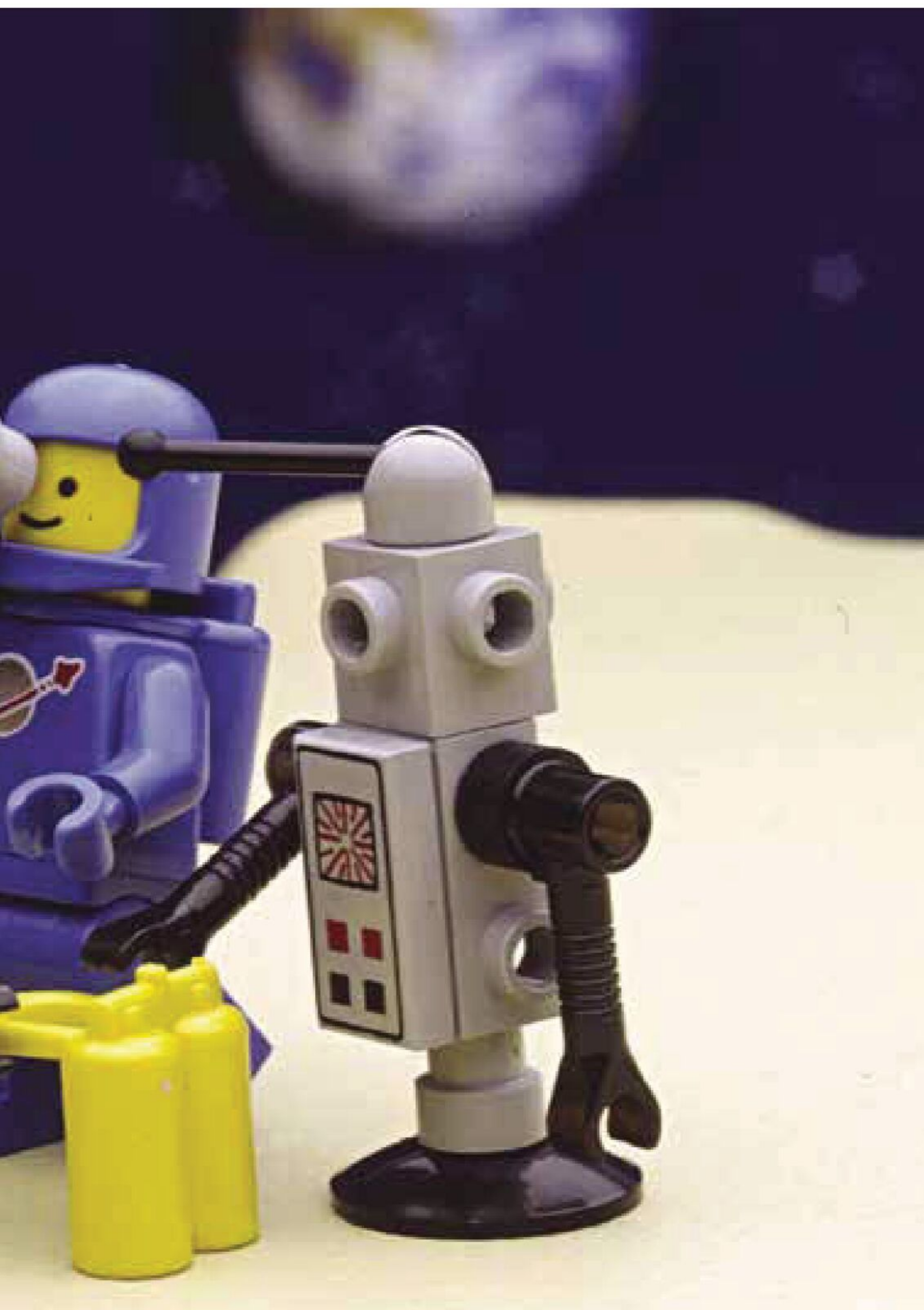
One of the strongest aspects of the theme was its universal colour palette of grey, blue, transparent yellow, and to a lesser extent, white and black. When the LEGO Group changed old grey to bluish grey (known as blay) in 2004, it marked the end of any future Classic Space building in the original colour palette, and now there are only a finite amount of old grey bricks remaining in the world to make Classic Space and classic Castle models with.

THE ULTIMATE CLASSIC SPACE SET

Despite running for nearly a decade, many fans consider the iconic Classic Space set to be one that launched towards the beginning in 1979 – 928 Space Cruiser with Moonbase, more commonly known as 497 Galaxy Explorer. Several things make this set special. Firstly, its size. At the time this was one of the biggest, and heaviest, LEGO constructions you could get. To a six-year-old's hands, 928 felt and looked enormous. It took two hands to pick it up – not that the size limited its swooshability.

It's a beast to build too, with lots of grey plates building out the superstructure three plates thick before the main fuselage is added. It

THE MINIFIGURES WERE EQUIPPED WITH WALKIE-TALKIES, SPANNERS AND METAL DETECTORS



The original LEGO astronaut.

has the right blend of grey to blue, highlighted by the transparent yellow cockpit. The proportions are also beautiful; that diamond shape with clean lines and those two massive wing-mounted engines. Finally, there are four 'bumblebee' strips. These were only found on 928 and 924 and may have been inspired by Allied invasion identification stripes added to aircraft in World War II, or they could have just been brick greebling to break up the surface detail.

As well as the ship itself, there was also the addition of a home base and landing pad, plus as a rover that is 'birthed' from the mothership's rear doors. Without going too Freudian, it was the combination of a safe home base, protecting mothership and little scout buggy that offered a huge amount of dynamic play potential.

WHERE CLASSIC SPACE DIDN'T GO

Some areas the theme didn't address were habitation and food supply. You'd never go hungry in 1980s Town sets with their profusion of cafes and snack bars, but in Space, there was little time for the comforts of home. Indeed the only set to feature any kind of 'off duty' element was 6970 Beta-1 Command Base, which had two beds in which the astronauts could get some shut-eye after a busy day (after hanging up their air tanks).

Medical facilities were another lacking area given how many hospital and vehicle sets Town had and how often the sick bay was featured in TV shows like Star Trek. With films like 1972's Silent Running and the emerging environmental movement, it's surprising that a hydroponic or space farm set was never included in the theme.

CLASSIC SPACE'S LASTING INFLUENCE

For many AFOLs, Classic Space is all about looking to recapture that joy of youth; the Christmas morning or birthday high, that feeling of a world to build where the hero avatar will always win and everything is awesome. The inclusion of Benny in The LEGO Movie, complete with cracked helmet, is a good illustration of the theme's longstanding LEGO legacy – even non-AFOL audiences recognised the character.

But beyond Classic Space's lasting impact within the LEGO Group and LEGO fandom is the wonder and curiosity it generated in children across the globe for what's beyond our atmosphere. Some of those children now work for the likes of NASA, ESA and other institutions connected with the scientific exploration of space – it's commonplace to see LEGO models on desks at space agencies.

By launching a range of sets with several scientific functions, not just space flight, the theme foreshadowed what is actually needed in space today – resource prospecting, habitation and communications. That 'near future' Space promised over 40 years ago is now coming true. In that sense, Classic Space was decades ahead of its time.

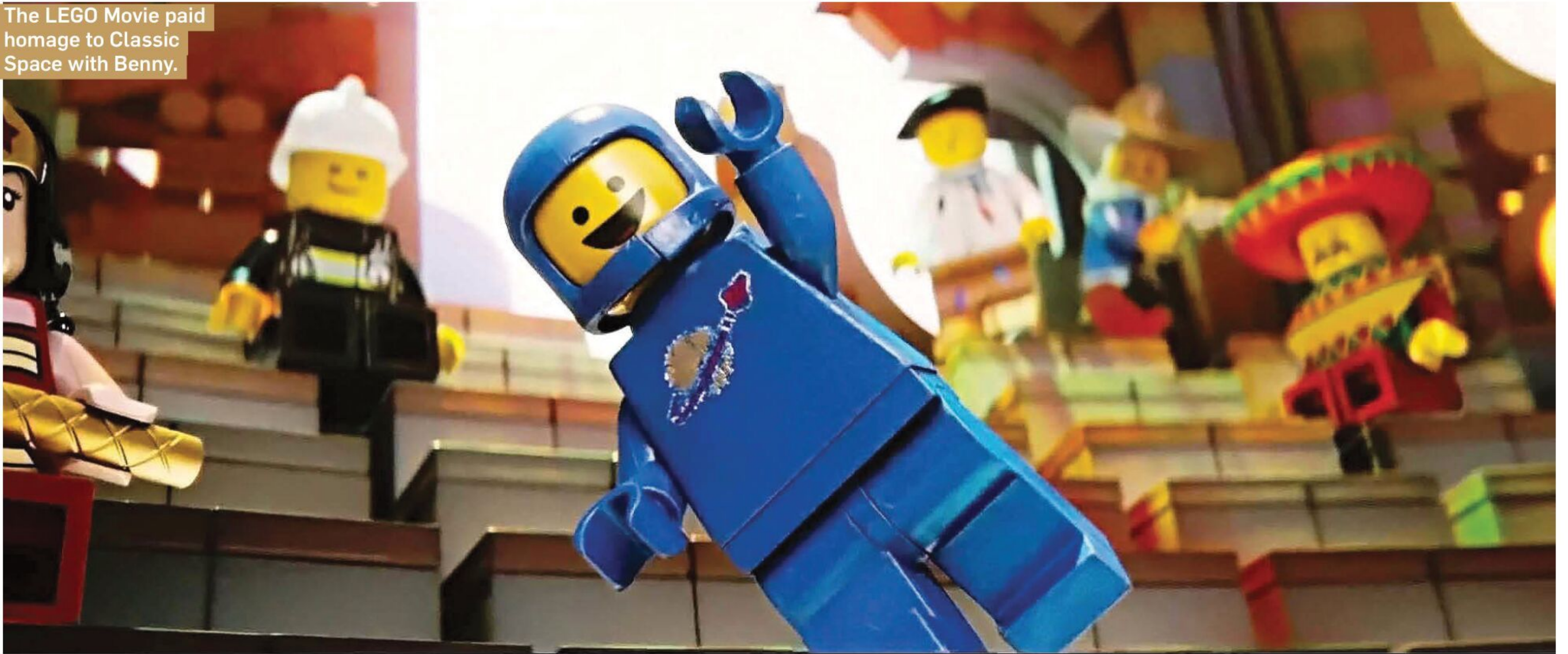
The last word goes to Nikola Vitas, a solar physicist at Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias: 'What did Classic Space mean to me growing up? It meant so much that at the age of 11, in Yugoslavia, I became an amateur astronomer, later I studied astrophysics, did my PhD in solar physics, worked for the Dutch space agency... and now, at 47, I work as a theoretical astrophysicist for one of the best astronomical institutes in the world. On my office desk, I always have a couple of spacemen from my childhood.' ■

MANY FANS CONSIDER THE ICONIC CLASSIC SPACE SET TO BE 497 GALAXY EXPLORER

A few modern products have paid tribute to Classic Space.



The LEGO Movie paid homage to Classic Space with Benny.



Space fan features 497 Galaxy Explorer on her torso.



There's a grey Space torso beneath Rocket Boy's costume.

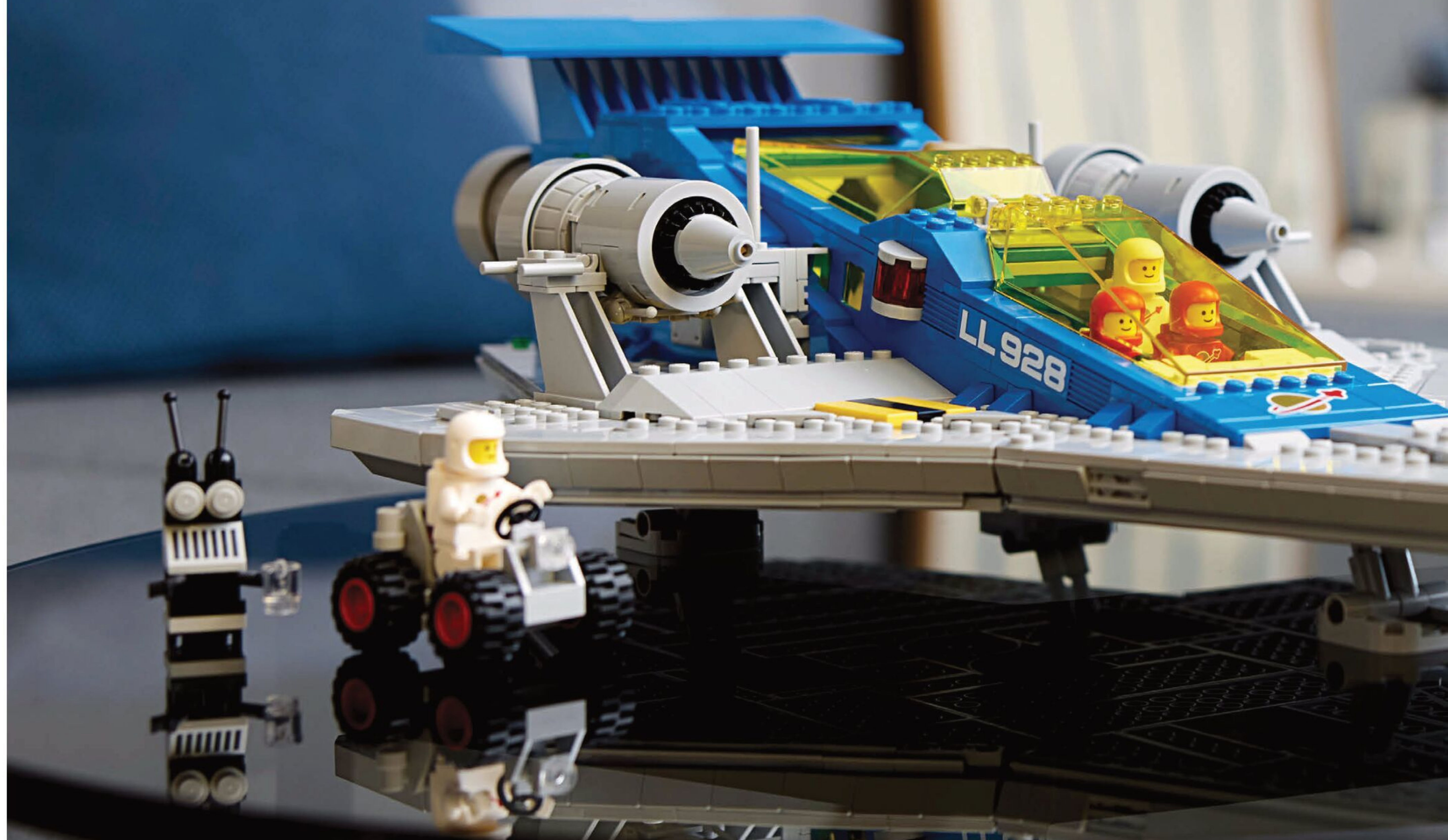
A pink astronaut was introduced in The LEGO Movie 2.



BRINGING BACK GALAXY EXPLORER

Design Master Mike Psiaki explains how he modernised
497 Galaxy Explorer for the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary

Words: Graham Hancock **Pics:** The LEGO Group



Galaxy Explorer
is back.

FANS OF CLASSIC Space were relieved to find out that Castle isn't having all of the fun in the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary year. With nostalgic, yellow-striped packaging and in a classic colour scheme, 10497 Galaxy Explorer is revisiting a theme that sparked the imaginations of children all over the world.

Design Master Mike Psiaki had the entirely enviable task of revisiting 497 Galaxy Explorer in a way that would satisfy nostalgic adults who also demand a top tier build experience. Not only did he deliver an updated 497, but he came up with alternate models so that fans have the option of building updated versions of 918 One Man Space Ship or 924 Space Cruiser instead.

Blocks: How did you choose the size for 10497 Galaxy Explorer?

Mike: The size of the modern version is scaled off my seven-year-old son. We've been talking a lot about nostalgia here. [Fellow Designer] Milan [Madge] and I, we like to buy and build a lot of old LEGO sets. It's not as interesting to buy modern LEGO sets, because we've been involved in the development of a lot of them. Our LEGO budgets go towards buying the old stuff that we never had as kids.

A lot of the models we build are not quite as impressive as what I imagined they would be or what I remember them being like when I played with them. We thought maybe a big part of that is actually that we're just bigger; the LEGO model has grown smaller in proportion to us.

We wanted to scale up the Galaxy Explorer so that it would feel like you're a child holding it. I compared my height to my seven-year-old son's height and found, I'm 50% taller than he is, so 150% of his height. We used that as a scaling factor.

Originally we started with, 'what if we doubled everything?', just because at the LEGO Group, we like the idea of doubling things. But it was so big and so silly, and we didn't really have any good reason why it should be doubled.

Can you share the thinking behind offering updated versions of 918 One Man Space Ship and 924 Space Cruiser as alternate builds?

One of our co-workers, Kurt Kristiansen, was looking at the model. And he just said, 'This is cool, but I never had the big one, I had 918 – the One Man Space Ship.' I just thought wow, if you look at those old sets, it's all the same pieces, Galaxy Explorer is just a bigger version. Why could we not just make all three from the one set? So from like very early on, I knew that it was something we wanted to do.

From a development standpoint, I've had a lot of experience in Creator 3-in-1 so it wasn't a super crazy task to figure out how we can achieve it. If you build many Creator 3-in-1 sets, you'll know we get very creative sometimes with the way that we reuse the bricks in order to make things work. But these three models really make a lot of sense in the way they're built. I would hope that people build one of the alternate versions and won't necessarily feel like it is an alternate model, it will feel a lot like this is something that is meant to be.

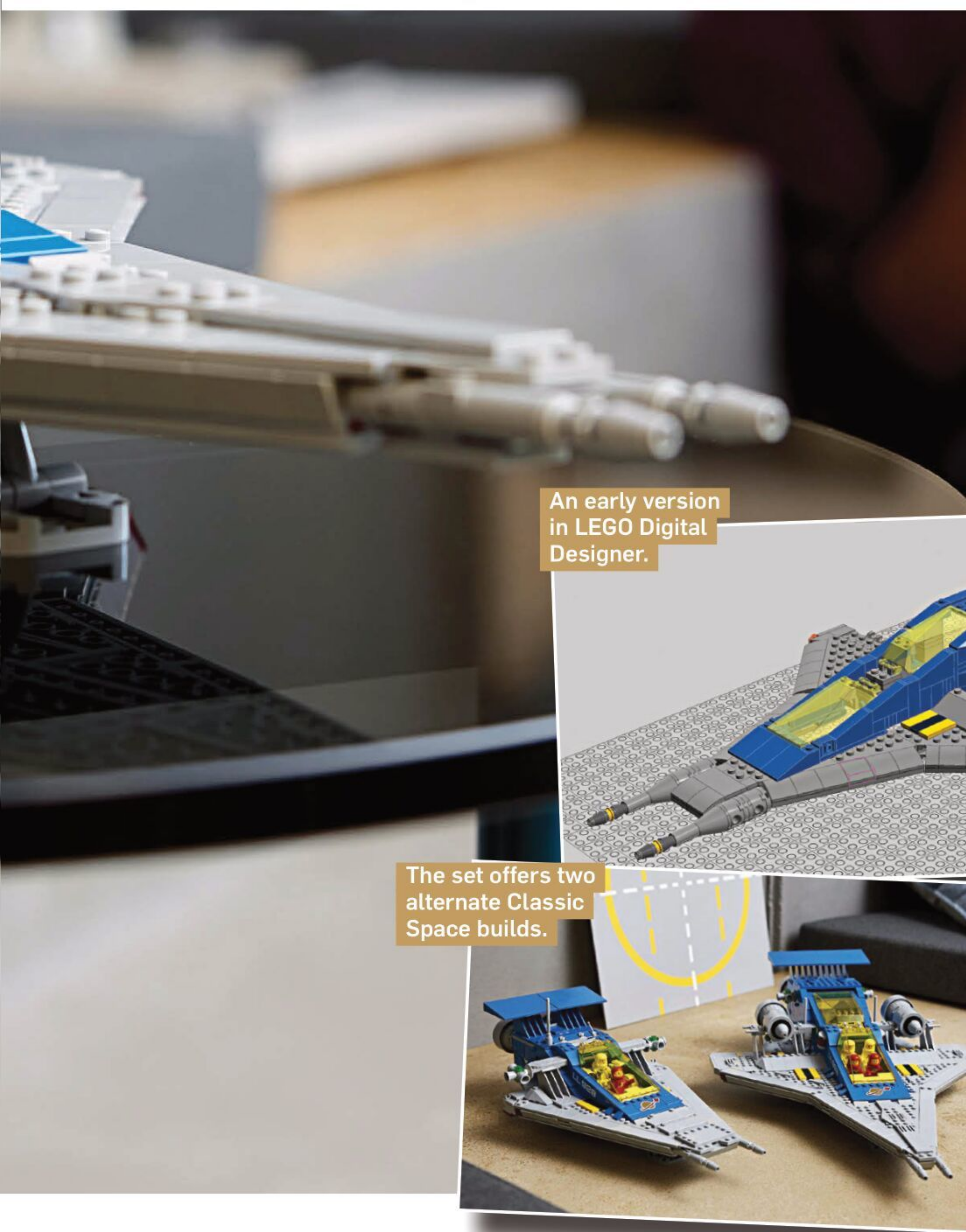
WE WANTED TO SCALE UP THE GALAXY EXPLORER SO THAT IT WOULD FEEL LIKE YOU'RE A CHILD HOLDING IT

What details in the finished model are you most pleased with?

There's the arrow that's on the doors on the back. That was originally planned to be done as a graphic. Our graphic designer, Ashwin Visser, challenged me and just said, 'why don't you build that detail? Why are you using a graphic?' I just thought that was kind of a dumb idea, that it wasn't going to look very good. But then I just played around with it for a day and we came up with that solution using the NEXO KNIGHTS tile. I'm super, super happy that we explored that and also that we could find that solution, it's a nice thing of like seeing the model become more intricate, so that maybe the Galaxy Explorer has grown up with you.

Then this isn't a detail of the original but I'm really satisfied with the way the whole cockpit section is built at an angle. The geometry of how that all connects together to create a quite sleek shape is something that is kind of the icon of the original – the very, very clean lines. To be able to have that clean line, but in a very different way I think is really cool.

And then the last part is the ramp function in the back, the way that all came together. We were exploring a lot of super complicated scissor mechanisms and stuff on how we could make it work, because we really wanted to have this thing open up and have the rover drive out in a way that is an homage to the original but also something new. The solution we ended up with, is very, very simple, but also a super satisfying play experience. So that was great. ■



An early version in LEGO Digital Designer.

The set offers two alternate Classic Space builds.



Design Master Mike Psiaki.

PAINTING WITH **BRICKS**

The Starry Night design team reveals how Truman Cheng's homage to Van Gogh's masterpiece was adapted for a picture-perfect model

Words: Kat Rees-Jauke **Pics:** The LEGO Group

STARING OUT ONTO the French countryside from his asylum window, Vincent Van Gogh painted the swirling curves of the night sky mainly from memory, utilising the impressionist brushstrokes he'd perfected after decades of work. Yet, in a letter to his brother, he deemed *The Starry Night* a failure, not even considering the canvas worth selling.

While Van Gogh may have been exceptionally critical of the work, *The Starry Night* is now considered the artist's magnum opus. It has captured the imagination of art lovers across the world, including LEGO fan designer Truman Cheng.

'I love the painting because the brushstrokes draw you into the image in such a dynamic way,' says Truman, as he passionately explains the inspiration behind the model. 'It is a still image but the brushstrokes seem to be moving, which gives me a magical feeling when I look at it.'



■ IT IS A STILL IMAGE BUT THE BRUSHSTROKES SEEM TO BE MOVING ■



Truman Cheng's
concept became
21333 The
Starry Night.

Creating LEGO swirls was a challenge.



Microscale captures the village scene.



Fortunately, 10,000 people share Truman's love of the painting – or at least discovered it through his excellent design – and voted for his product idea. It went through the usual LEGO Ideas review process and received the thumbs up.

Ideas has always been about pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved in the brick, but The Starry Night is unique in that it takes something two dimensional and makes it three dimensional. 'When I thought about building this project I thought that three dimensional would give the whole build more impact. It makes it more than just a replica of a famous painting,' says Truman.

Indeed, instead of being a flat carbon copy, his design adds texture and depth by layering the foreground and background of The Starry Night, with the cypress tree becoming particularly prominent. This is a part of the painting that has fascinated art historians for decades, often interpreted as symbolic of space between life and death, implying Van Gogh's musings about his own mortality.

While it may be the flattest part of the Starry Night painting, Truman's design has it inverted, and that was deliberate. 'LEGO itself as a medium is unique because it is three dimensional, so I tried to make this the best combination between the original painting and LEGO,' he says. 'I also wanted a diorama effect so that when you view it from an angle the cypress in the foreground shifts a little, moving with the viewer. I am very happy that the Ideas team kept this aspect of the project.'

This isn't the first time that art has become a LEGO set, with the entire Art theme offering mosaic recreations. However, when it came to the Starry Night a new partnership was needed as Van Gogh's art is protected against unapproved replicas. Any artist needs to be acknowledged for their work, even for a painting as old as The Starry Night. Enter the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the institution that exhibits the original painting in New York. 'The main reason we worked so closely with MoMA was

because they have a very experienced curation team. They had a lot of insights that we wouldn't have had otherwise and that brought an extra level of authenticity,' explains Ideas Design Manager Jordan Scott.

When dealing with such a recognisable image, these insights were an invaluable resource for the design team, with MoMA providing feedback on critical elements during the design stages. 'It is always interesting working with licensing partners because they have to recognise that this is a LEGO product, so there are limitations to what we can do. They had a lot of trust in us designing this model,' says Design Master Søren Dyrhøj, who was tasked with bringing the wonders of the night into an official set. 'When I started out designing the model I could see there were so many variations in colour depending on the camera used, so MoMA sent a poster from their collection that is accurate to the original Starry Night. I used that as a reference.'

While authenticity to the painting is key, so is ensuring that builders do not give up in frustration when putting the set together. 'What we have to think about

when designing a model like this is the search time for the bricks,' Søren continues. 'Putting in only one 1x1 plate in light blue would be pretty evil! So, what I did was I tried to align as many sizes of bricks as possible so the background contains many 1x4 plates. If I had used lots of 1x2 and 1x3 plates in the same colour, the search time would be way too long and it would be super difficult to build up the model.'

While the painting has the advantage of oils blended into the myriad blues and yellows that make the Starry Night so hypnotising, the designers were limited to the official LEGO colour palette. 'The technique I used was that I have a mosaic app on my phone where I can input the official LEGO colours. So, I took a photo of the poster and made this mosaic so I could see what it would look like in the LEGO colours,' Søren says.

After perfecting the colours, it took trial and error to figure out how to recreate the organic swirls of the night sky, going through multiple

THE MORE IMPOSSIBLE IT IS, THE MORE I WANT TO WORK ON IT



LEGO Ideas continues to deliver fresh concepts.

iterations to perfect the shapes. 'The more impossible it is, the more I want to work on it. I saw it and thought, "I've never done anything like this before", and that just made me want to do it even more,' laughs the design master. 'I had to build in four different directions because I wanted to make it as close to the original as possible. The swirls are what makes The Starry Night what it is, and I am really satisfied with how they look.'

The swirls weren't the only parts of the model that went through multiple iterations though – it took some fiddling to get the stars dancing in the right places. 'I had two iterations. After doing the first one, I then realised I needed to add a little bit more here and there, and I made the second one. I could see where I needed to place the stars so that they are as accurately positioned as possible.'

21333 utilises a myriad of SNOT techniques and curved pieces to imitate the brushstrokes of the painting, changing out Truman's originally brick-built stars for specially printed elements. 'One of the only things MoMA insisted on were that the stars be printed elements,' says Søren,

'We worked pretty hard on the detailing of the stars and how many to include within the sky,' adds Senior Graphic Designer Niken Hartomo. An ardent Van Gogh fan herself, she was excited to be involved with the set, creating mood boards to surround her workspace to fully incorporate his impressionism into her graphic designs – including the minifigure of the Dutch master.

Van Gogh painted throughout the 19th century, a time when the camera existed, yet he was famously camera shy, claiming that photos 'lacked life' and refusing to pose for any. That meant that Niken had to use some artistic flair. 'It was very thrilling. I was very grateful to make this minifigure, I wanted to make it truly Van Gogh. For reference I used a lot of his self-portraits and I tried to mimic the way he portrayed himself with short, curved and dynamic lines. The minifigure is basically its own painting – I included Van Gogh's style everywhere I could, even in his beard.'

Søren decided to find a way to incorporate the minifigure into the model.

'When I saw the minifigure I wanted it to be part of the painting. When hanging it on a wall, where do you add the minifigure? I added the stand and it almost looks like Van Gogh is painting the model. You can also pose it in different ways, having the stand to the side or on the picture, and that way Van Gogh can follow you when you're moving the painting around.'

Van Gogh is wielding some rather special new pieces, which Jordan points out are unique to 21333. 'We did a new colour for the LEGO paintbrush element so that it has a blue tip and the paint palette has a new print using the colours featured in the Starry Night. It lends a greater impact than if we'd used the ones currently in production, which are more the primary colours.'

Perhaps adding the greatest impact though is the frame now surrounding the finished model, increasing its piece count significantly from Truman's initial submission. It's unusual for so many pieces to be added to an Ideas model, but Søren points out that it really needed the

extra support: 'Having the frame makes it much stronger to be able to hang it on a wall, especially because of the LEGO Group's high stability requirements.'

THE MINIFIGURE IS BASICALLY ITS OWN PAINTING

The classy finishing touch also puts 21333 more in line with other LEGO Art models, though the black colour wasn't intended to match these other sets. 'The black colour of the frame is to mimic the painting right now. The Museum of Modern Art exhibit it in a black frame,' Jordan confirms. 'Having it this way adds an extra layer of authenticity.'

Making an authentic LEGO building experience is at the heart of every model, yet 21333 The Starry Night exemplifies this attention to even the smallest of details. The designers have spent a lot of time perfecting the overall aesthetic, so that when fans hang it on a wall, it's really like having The Starry Night painting on display. Van Gogh said: 'Great things are done by a series of small things brought together,' which rings true over 130 years later as each little tile, plate and stud celebrates his brilliant brushstrokes. ■

The artist at work.



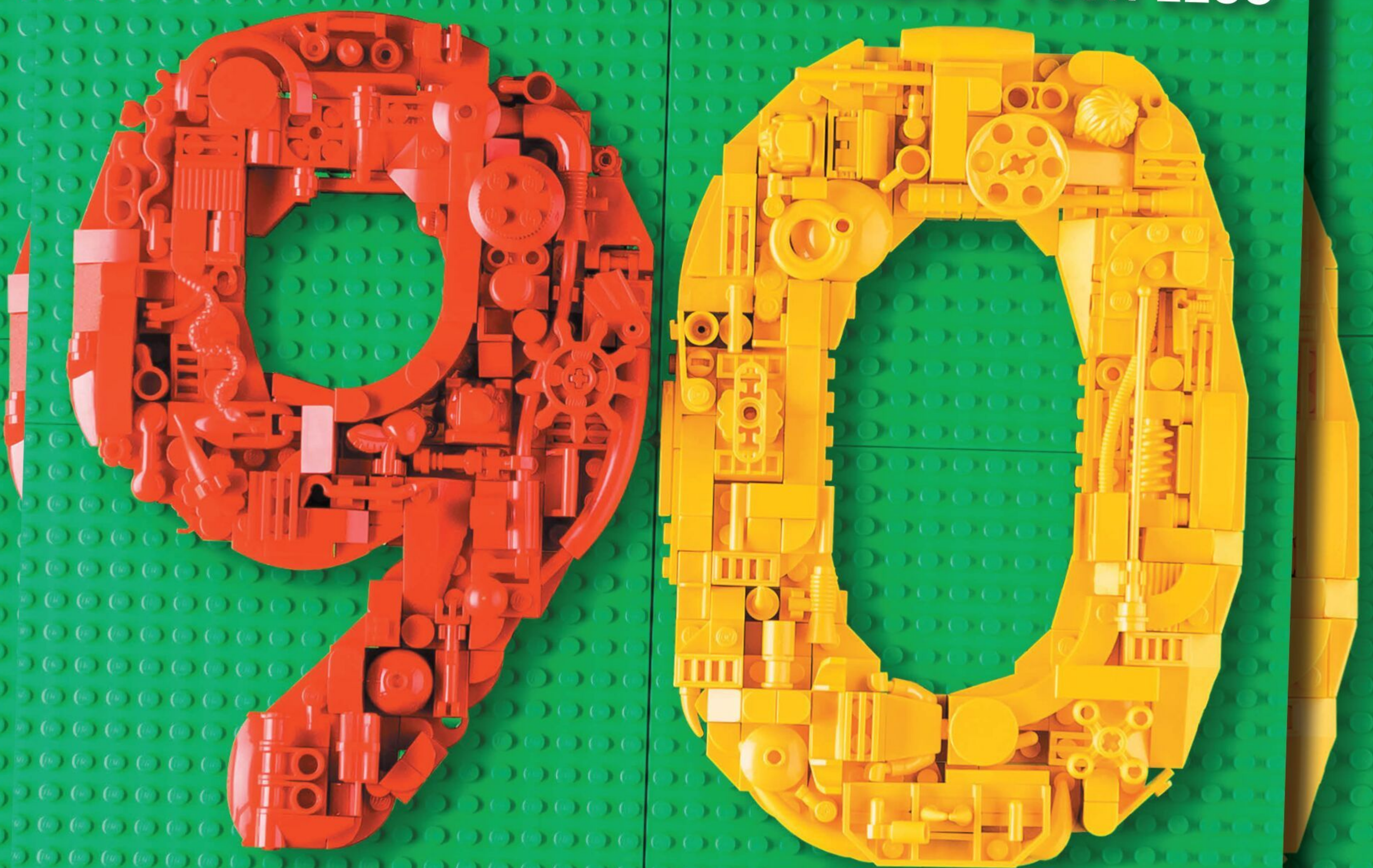
The tree is set forward from the backdrop.



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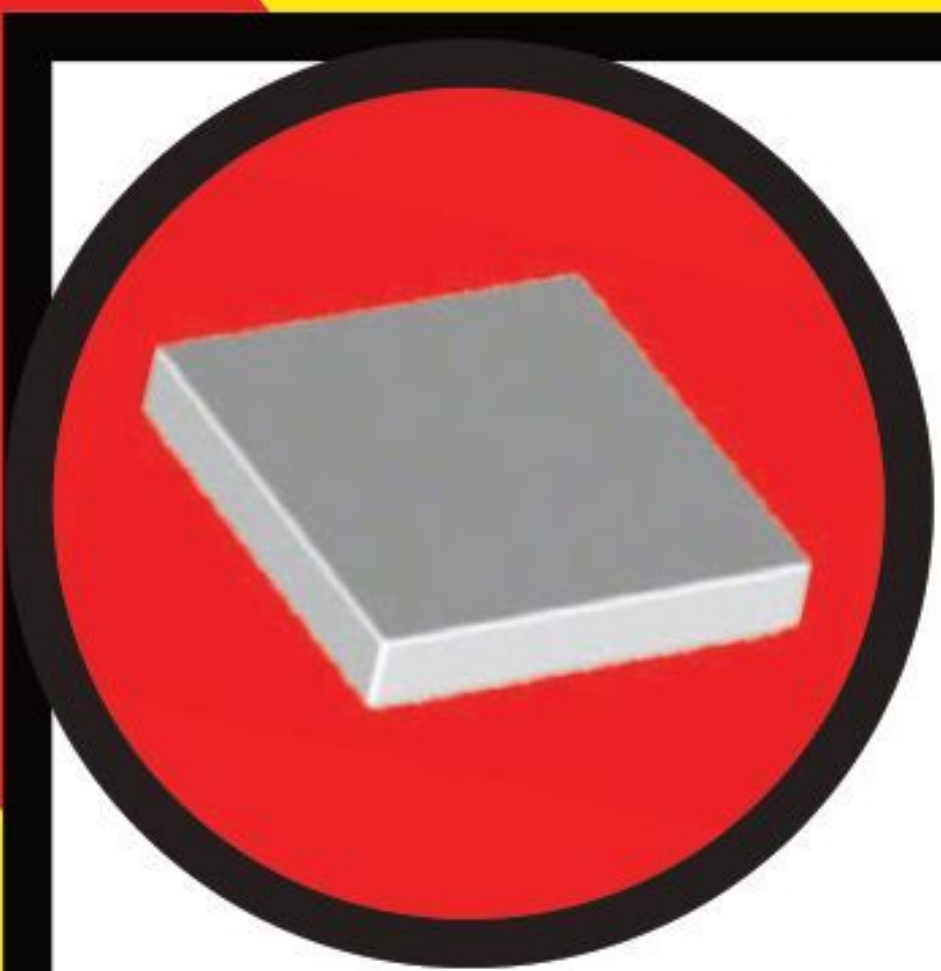
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10305 LION KNIGHTS' CASTLE

Have you been waiting for a LEGO castle? If so, this might be exactly what you had in mind

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

WHILE 375 CASTLE is the one the started it all in yellow (and is referenced in this set), Castle really came of age in 1984. That's when the Lion Knights arrived, bringing with them an at-the-time incredible lion design for the shields and torsos, and two grey castles; 6073 Knight's Castle and 6080 King's Castle. What made those fortresses special is that they were grey – so actually looked like castles – and by the standards of the time were huge. To child-sized hands, they were substantial models.

In 2022 though, 664 pieces doesn't quite cut it. While there has been a castle recently in Creator, adult fans have been clamouring for something closer to what they had as children. The LEGO design team has decided to call the bluff of the fan community and given them what they want; a 4,514-piece set that will feel as big to them today as 6080 did 38 years ago.

In the intervening decades though there have been many Castle fans, so although this castle belongs to the Lion Knights who really elevated

this theme, there are lots of references, nods and influences from the many subthemes that have come since. It's hard to imagine a retro LEGO castle without Majisto, and sure enough, that bearded wizard is back.

As much as moulded baseplates may have been an important part of some of the most sizable LEGO fortresses, they have faded into brick history – and probably wouldn't be able to handle the weight of a model like this anyway. Instead, one half requires building up some landscape and caverns beneath the castle in order to get to the building of the actual medieval monument.

First though, the other half of the castle is built flat on the tabletop. As much as the classic castle models are great fun to put together, this immediately lets you know that castles have grown up. Instead of laying down plates and bricks to build empty rooms, you're putting together a kitchen, a water wheel, a millstone, then a room with a harpsichord, all contained

CLASSIC LEGO CASTLE SETS WERE ALWAYS HINGED

Grab your sword.



Unwanted guests go to the dungeon.





Watch out on the drawbridge.



Forest Guardians are hiding out.



Time for croissants.



The queen's chamber.



Lion Knights are back.

The set offers a full castle life.



The band of Black Knights.



Living the medieval life.



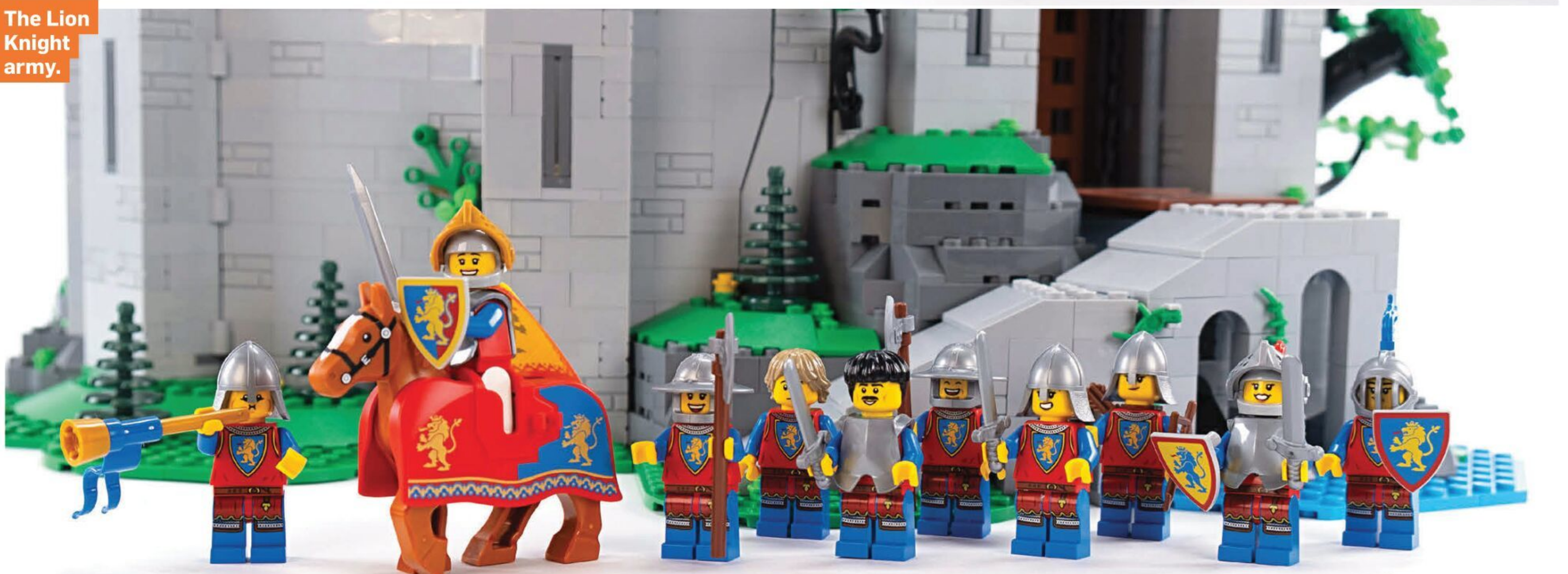
The Forest Guardians.



The Black Knights arrive.



The Lion Knight army.



within the grey castle walls.

It's somewhat reminiscent of a cleverly angled modular building in that you'll be building up a wall with traditional one-stud-wide bricks, then there's a clever little oven or harpsichord to put together, before you add more height to the model.

Things switch up nicely when it's time to build the black-and-white thatched building that uses unexpected parts to do an incredible job of conveying the roof. There is excellent parts usage in the queen's bedroom, with party hats used as part of the bed frame, while the dining room features a selection of retro-looking printed shields.

Classic LEGO Castle sets were always hinged; where certain models would have open backs to access the interiors and minifigures, Castle opted towards sets that could be fully enclosed then opened up. Despite upping the scale so significantly, the two sections of this model open up through the use of hinges. Choosing the place to make the break wisely would have been impressive enough, but the designers have built in a 'magic wall' to really make this something

exceptional. You'll wonder why you're building a hinged wall at the time, but once it's complete it's clear; when unfolded, the wall becomes straight and presents as a bridge above the water wheel; when closed, it folds in on itself and becomes a wall.

THIS SECTION IS MORE ABOUT BATTLE, MAGIC AND IMPRISONING YOUR ENEMIES

When it comes to the next part of the castle, the section that provides the front entrance and drawbridge, it is once again a case of starting from a flat base and building foundations for what's to come. The other half of the fortress is focused more on civilian life, whereas this section is more about battle, magic and imprisoning your enemies. Things are relatively simple and always pacy until it comes time to incorporate the functions; they require a

little more attention to detail than the set has demanded up until this point.

There are two excellent functions in the castle's entrance. The first is the drawbridge – it can be fully raised and fully lowered. When it's halfway between though, it tips an unsuspecting minifigure into the dungeon, where they can join the skeleton (which was first introduced in the Castle theme).

If that were the only entranceway function, it would probably be enough to delight the grown adults who are going to be playing with this model as if they are eight years old. But there's something else too – the portcullis can be cranked up, opening the entranceway for friends to come through; should the enemies arrive though, a quick flick of a lever sends it crashing closed.

Speaking of traps, there's an easy one to fall into when it comes to old LEGO sets – you can assume that those that had an impact you had an impact on everyone. Given the inclusion of Forest Guardians in this set though, it seems that the Robin Hood infused faction managed to cultivate a sizable fanbase despite its relatively



small number of sets and lack of actual castles in a theme called Castle.

These bandits are cleverly integrated into this set in a very organic way. The main tree has a secret entrance at the bottom, where there's a little storage area for the Forest Guardians as well as an opening to spring prisoners from the cell. Better still though are the caverns beneath the castle that provide a larger area for the green-clad outlaws to plot, complete with a borrowed Pirates map.

A set of this size only comes alive if it is populated with minifigures and there are no

VERDICT

Nostalgia and history combine for a beautiful set that demands to be played with.

96/100

complaints there. The Lion Knights have been updated perfectly, looking very familiar but with a few tweaks to bring them closer to modern minifigure standard. The updated caparisons, shields and flags are of course essential in complementing the minifigures.

Would you even notice the brown frog in this set? Probably not, but the annotations in the instruction book call attention to it, questioning why it is brown. It's a strange piece of text that you forget about, until you're building three stories up and it becomes clear that you're putting together... a lavatory. The hole beneath



the window frame is perfectly aligned for the poor brown frog. Even if you're not a fan of toilet humour, it's hard not to be impressed that this was thought through so carefully. It might be a smelly way to make the point, but it exemplifies the designers' attention to detail in this model.

It is impossible to avoid comparisons to 21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay; despite 10305 being a thoroughly enjoyable build, a delightful trip down memory lane and an entirely playable model... it is one model. What elevated 21322 beyond a sophisticated nostalgia build is the way it could be reconfigured without being rebuilt.

Had 10305 come first, it would have been that little bit more impressive – but given that we

A SET OF THIS SIZE ONLY COMES ALIVE IF IT IS POPULATED WITH MINIFIGURES

know just what these genius designers are capable of, it means that this ends up as the lesser of the redux models.

Lesser is of course a relative term, and this is still an absolutely phenomenal model. That the design team has captured the spirit of Castle and delivered it in a single model, one at a scale that can satisfy adult fans, is an absolute triumph. There will undoubtedly be other impressive LEGO sets to come this year, but they will have to be pretty exceptional in order to top this very worthy 90th anniversary build. The price tag on this one might be high, but it's a king's ransom worth paying. ■



This wall encloses then unfolds.

A convincing thatched roof.



There are detailed rooms inside.

Price: £89.99, \$99.99, €99.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 1,254

10497 GALAXY EXPLORER

Four decades since its original release, the quintessential LEGO Classic Space set is enlarged and enhanced

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

VERDICT

The size of Galaxy Explorer has been increased to make every adult who builds it feel like a child again – and it succeeds.

96/100

CLASSIC SPACE WAS something special when it launched in 1978. It was the theme that went beyond everyday life and took the minifigure into the atmosphere, allowing children to imagine the potential of space exploration. The impact it had is so significant that there are subsections of the LEGO hobby dedicated to building modern versions of Classic Space sets to new creations set in the same universe.

Because Classic Space is so often revisited by talented fans, the initial impact of this 90th anniversary model was lessened – seeing a picture of it doesn't feel all that different from seeing pictures of any high quality, fan designed Neo Classic Space build.

Once you have your hands on this box though, it's not one you'll want to put down. The retro packaging makes opening the set up an exciting experience, with the artwork delivering all of the nostalgia you could ask for (if you do ask for more though that's fine, because there's plenty in the box).

What's interesting about 10497 Galaxy Explorer is that it is directly inspired by 497

Galaxy Explorer and 928 Space Cruiser and Moonbase. It's doing something very different to 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, which pulled together different castles to make something new; this set is literally taking a beloved model from yesteryear and updating it.

THIS SET IS LITERALLY TAKING A BELOVED MODEL FROM YESTERYEAR AND UPDATING IT

Another difference with the castle is that this is a more complex build. It begins with a Technic frame that will be needed to ensure stability, the starting point that everything else will anchor to. Plates provide the general shape, with tiled sections added around the edge to give it the shape it needs. These are attached using ingenious methods – some of which will be

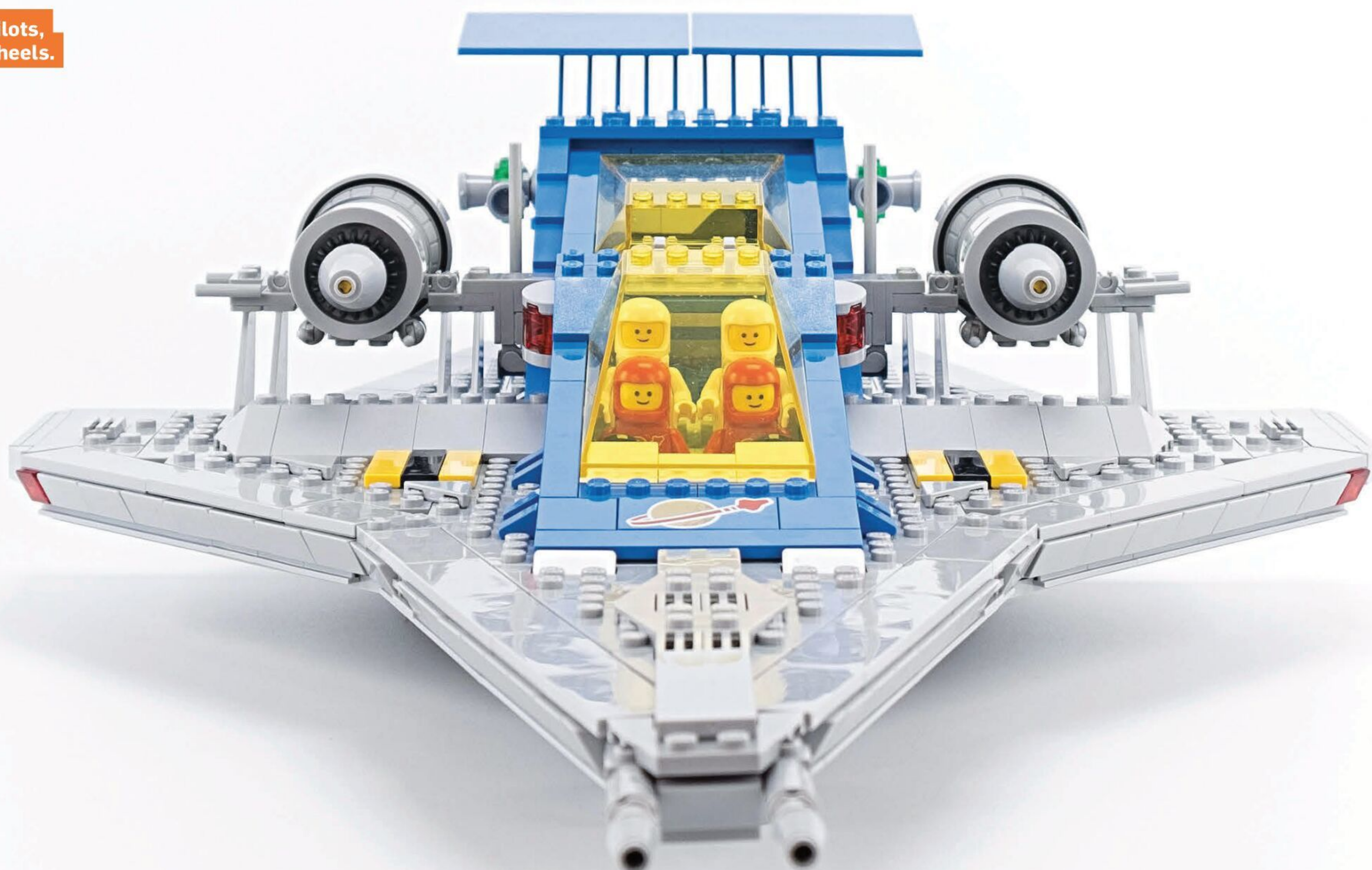
familiar to those who built 76161 1989 Batwing. In a neat touch, all of the hidden interior bricks are yellow and red, two colours that would have been around in 1979.

The way the slope of the central section is achieved is not overly complex, but it's an intelligent method for this scale. In this upgraded Galaxy Explorer, four minifigures can sit in the cockpit – so a bit more width is necessary than the old school version would allow. One yellow cockpit element encloses these pilots, while another protects the work and living area.

In that interior back section, there are a few pieces of equipment that the astronauts are clearly using for experiments. Even better, two beds are included, which have room built into them for the minifigures' air tanks – so there's no fiddly removal before putting them down for the night.

Every decoration in this set is printed onto an element rather than stickered, following the way things were done in the 1980s. From the LL 928 bricks to the Classic Space logo, this

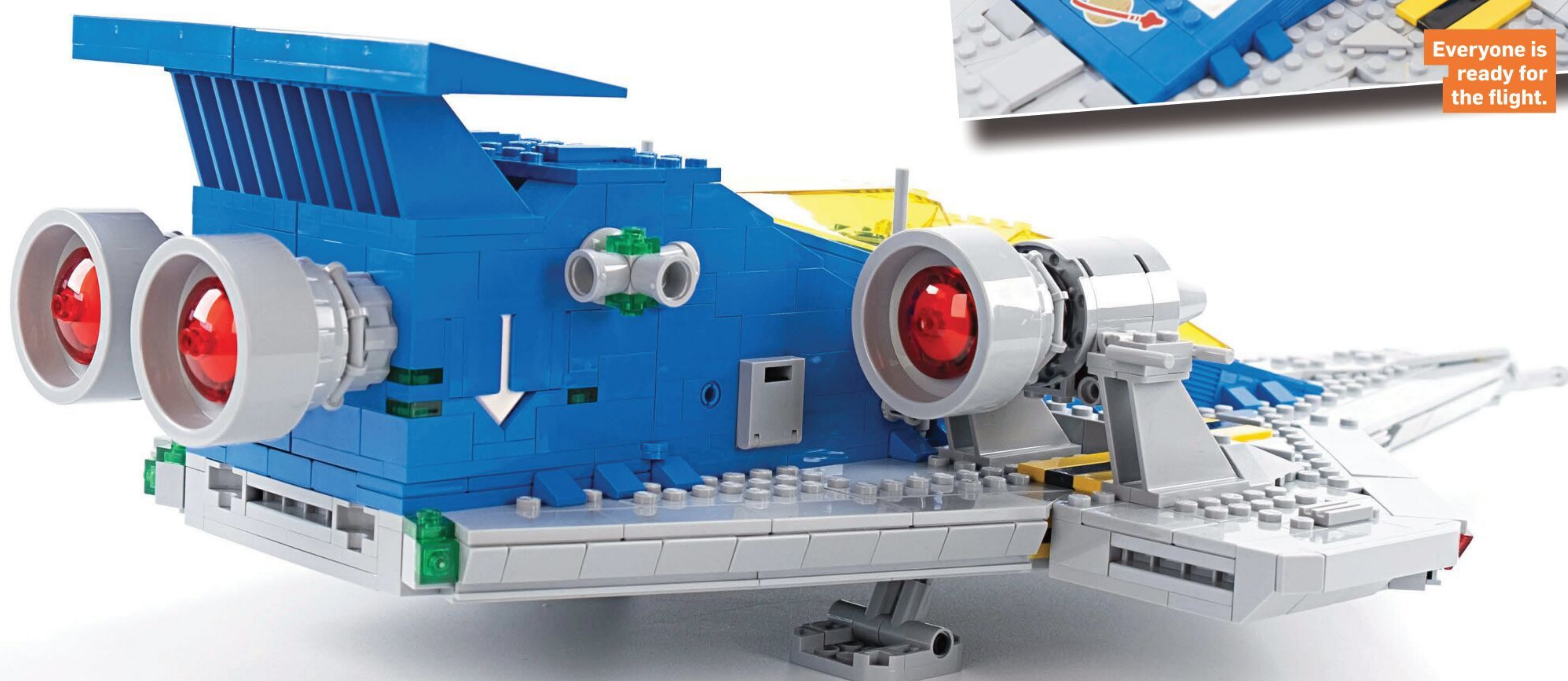
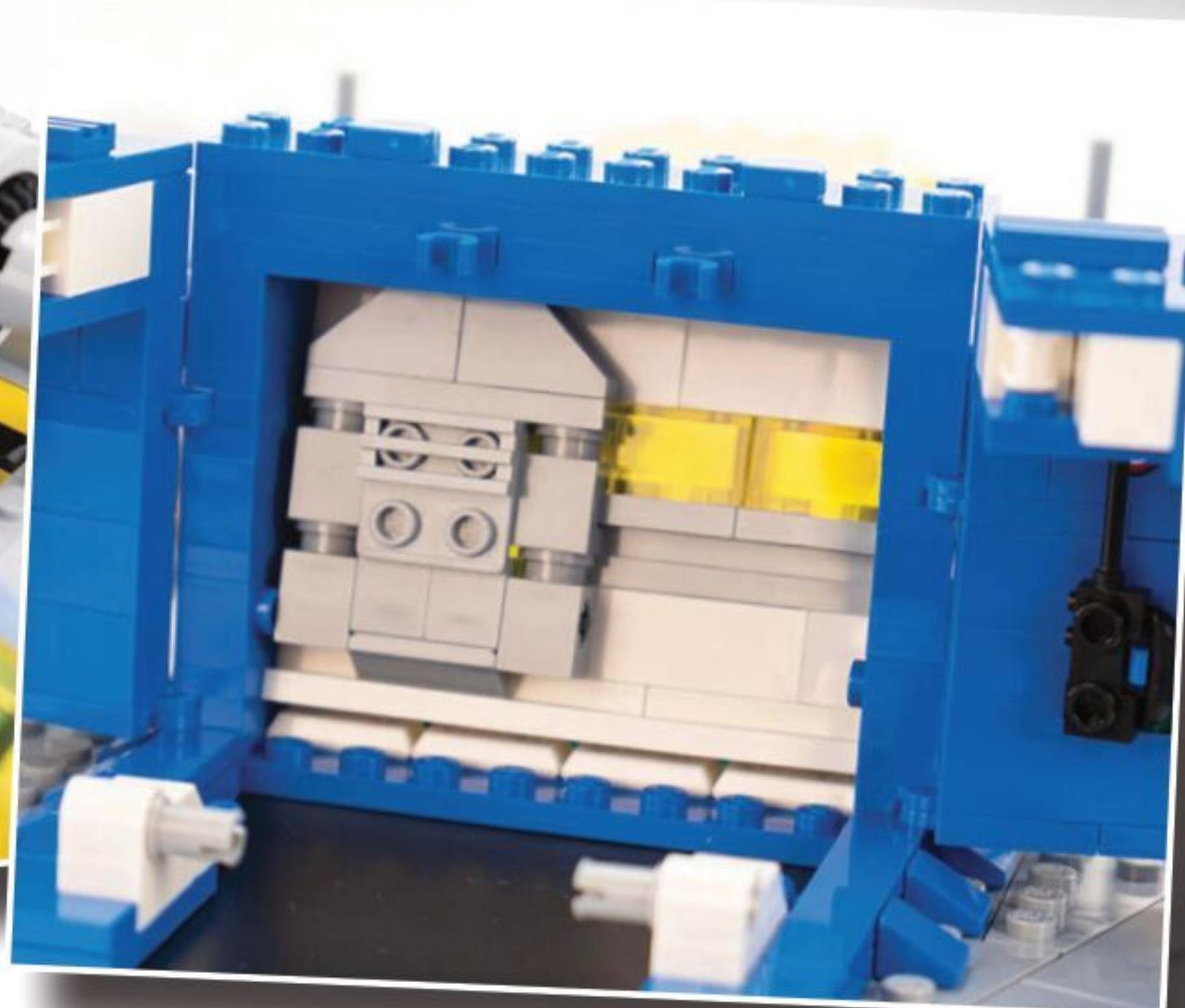
Two pilots,
two wheels.



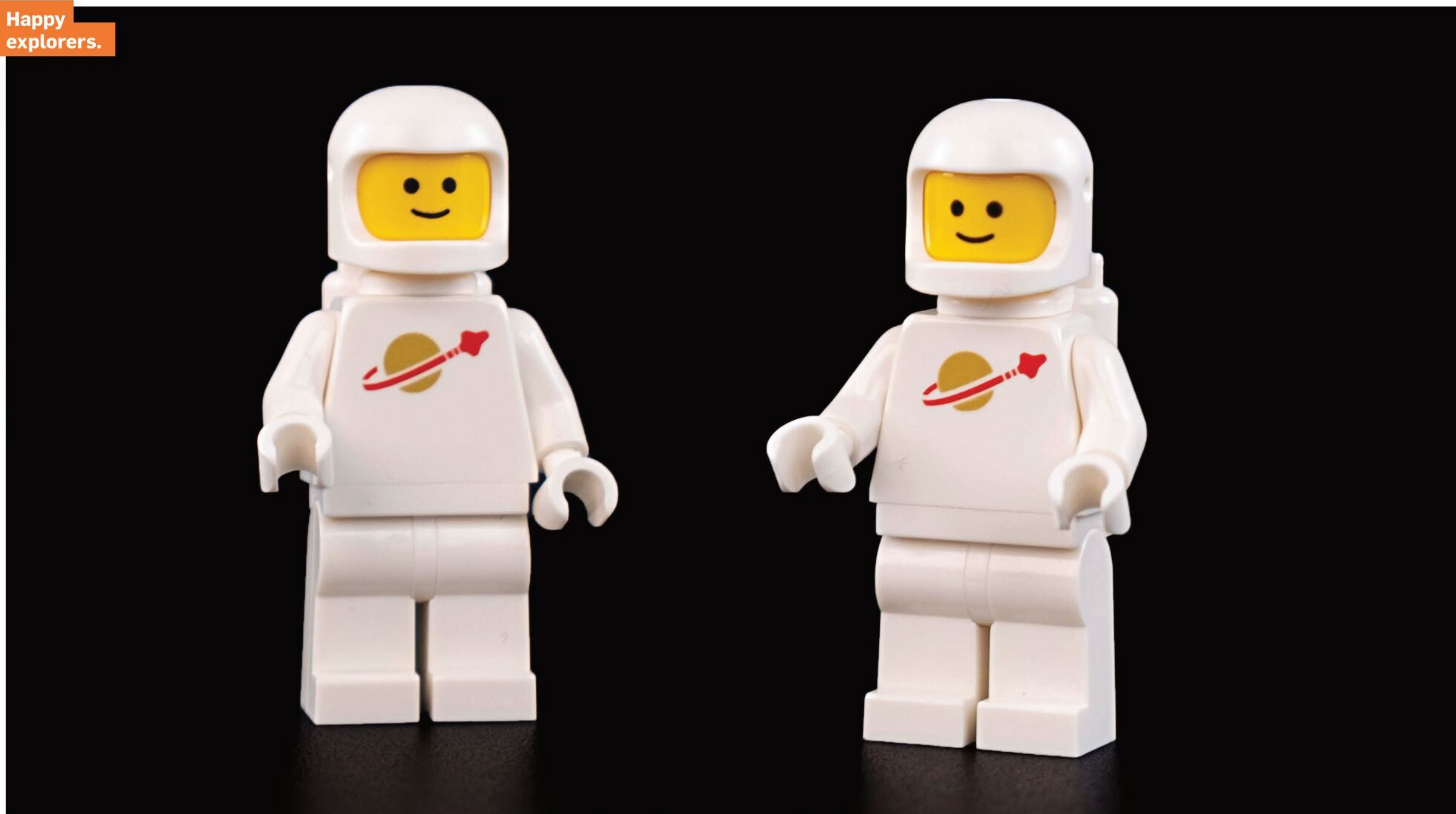


Galaxy Explorer is back – and bigger.

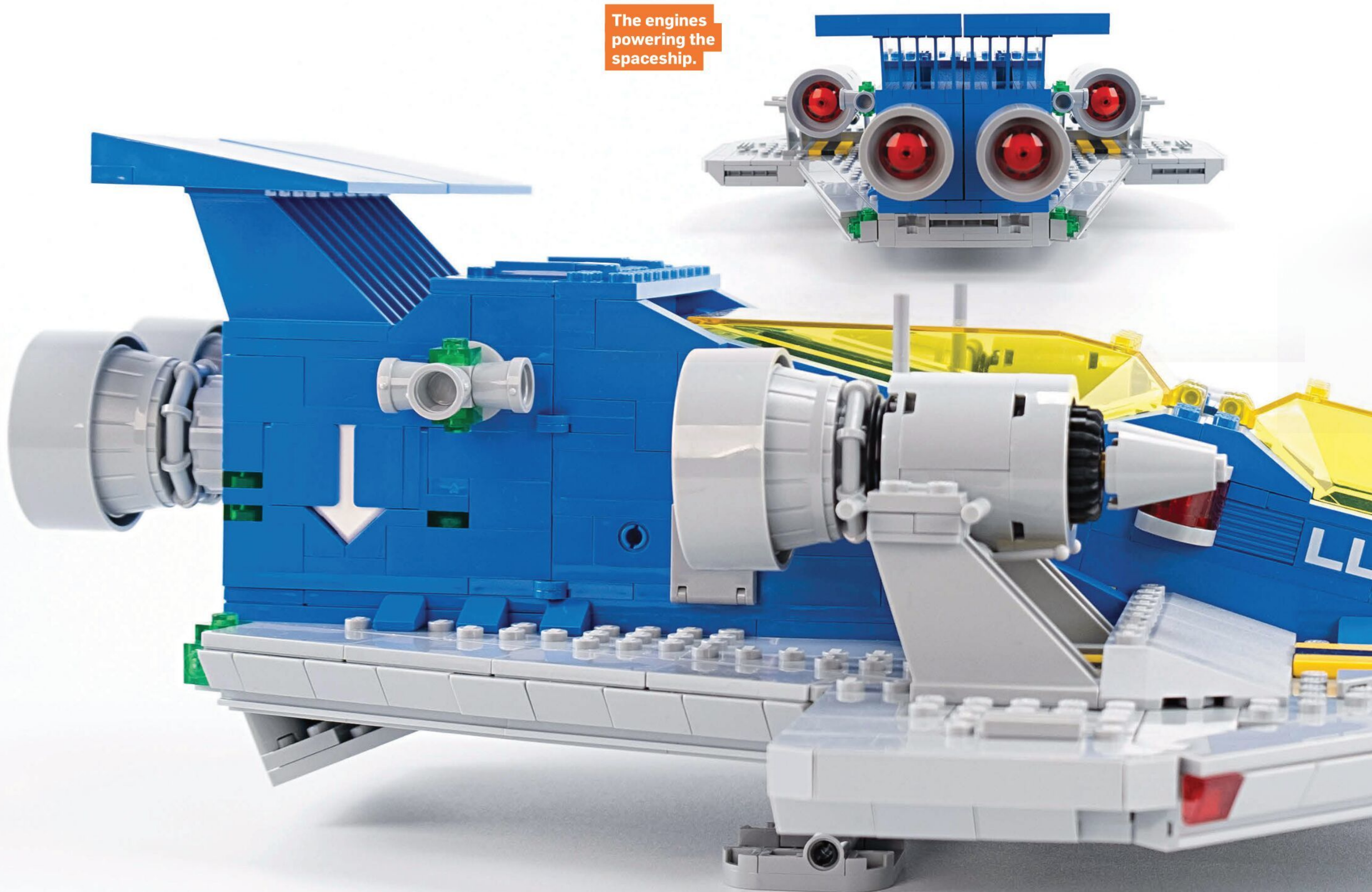
The astronauts are safe inside.



Happy explorers.



The engines powering the spaceship.



box is packed with appealing printed pieces that Classic Space fans will no doubt use in their own builds. One 2x2 tile even includes a reference to BIONICLE.

There's a small detail that is very much worth noting; at the back of the ship, the arrow found on the original model is present. Rather than having it printed, the designers figured out an absolutely ingenious way of depicting it with LEGO elements. It's worth studying how they did it and then using the technique in your own builds – it's very clever and will expand your perception of what certain elements can do.

Something better than that happens at the back of the set though – as was the case in the original, the back splits into two halves that swing open, revealing a buggy. Thanks to a great function with a large plate, the buggy can literally roll out of the ship's rear to explore whatever planet the team has landed on.

Getting Classic Space minifigures is no longer a huge novelty thanks to the likes of The LEGO Movie 2, 21109 Exo Suit and even the cover of official LEGO books. There's still a delight in

putting together those classic pieces though and seeing the most simple, smiling face peeking through the helmet.

When the build is complete, 10497 Galaxy Explorer delivers a delightfully large spaceship that has an appealingly sleek shape. Why is it

THIS IS PACKED WITH APPEALING PRINTED PIECES THAT CLASSIC SPACE FANS WILL USE IN THEIR OWN BUILDS

so successful as a model? Because 497 Galaxy Explorer was such an excellent design to begin with. Some Space sets were overengineered, adding too much greebling or throwing in too many play features. 497 had just enough boosters, lights and decoration to keep things interesting while focusing on the set's heroic form. By following that template faithfully in this

modern update, everything that's great about the original has been captured again, but with bang up to date techniques and pieces.

In case this set needed to offer anything more than it does as a regular single model set, there are two alternate builds with online instructions. 918 Space Transport and 924 Space Transporter are both classics too and giving fans the option to recreate them is an excellent idea.

Given that they have both been released in retro packaging for the 90th anniversary, comparisons to 10305 Lion Knights' Castle are unavoidable. Despite their similarities though, they are very different sets – this one updates a specific model, it offers two alternate builds and the techniques are more complex. It's not better than the modern Castle set, but it matches it in terms of quality. Fortunately this one is more affordable, although not quite to the extent that Classic Space sets were back in the day; but can you really put a price on reliving your childhood? ■



The back opens up.

The buggy rolls down the ramp.

Every decorated part is printed.

Price: Gift with purchase / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 258

40567 FOREST HIDEOUT

Castle gets another redux set focused on the beloved Robin Hood inspired faction

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

VERDICT

A classic set is recreated beautifully but has been made expensive to acquire.

79/100

BY THE TIME you read this, the promotion featuring this set is over – there's a chance the model will return for another round, but if not you'll need to head to the usual marketplace websites to buy it. It would have made more sense for this to be a regular release set, as anyone who was a Castle fan in the late 1980s or early 1990s is sure to want to add it to their collection.

Complementing 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, 40567 Forest Hideout goes down the route of 10497 Galaxy Explorer and recreates a specific set. Back in 1988, 6054 Forestmen's Hideout was a smaller set in the theme that offered a tree that opens up to reveal the titular hideout.

It's absolutely incredible how well this modern set recreates the original, especially considering just how many of the old elements

IT'S ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE HOW WELL THIS RECREATES THE ORIGINAL

are no longer in production. It's exactly what you want from a fresh take on a classic – it's entirely recognisable, but sleek and up to date compared to the quaint original.

Although it's not the way LEGO buildings typically open up today, 1980s and 1990s Castle models used hinged elements to reveal the interiors. That method is used in 40567 Forest Hideout, which opens to reveal a two-storey interior that makes good use of limited space.

The two minifigures are absolutely brilliant updates of the classics, adding more detail to the torsos without taking them too far from their inspiration.

From the refreshed Forest Guardians shield through the blue roof to the archer's target, this set is everything a Castle fan could ask for. It's a shame that so far it has only been available with a very high spend threshold. ■

The tree opens to reveal the interior.



Forest Guardians are back.



Familiar yet fresh.



Price: £44.99, \$TBC, €TBC / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 520

40556 MYTHICA

LEGOLAND Windsor Resort's newest themed land gets an exclusive LEGO set

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

VERDICT

LEGO MYTHICA demonstrates what these theme parks can be at their best – and 40556 does the same for LEGOLAND exclusive sets.

76/100

LEGO MYTHICA IS the newest land at LEGOLAND Windsor Resort – it opened last year and was expanded with a new walk-through attraction this year. It's also the best realised land at the theme park, on a par with The LEGO Movie lands at some of the other LEGOLAND parks. There's a carefully throughout theme that runs throughout MYTHICA and makes it feel like an immersive section of the UK's LEGOLAND.

That must have made life easier for the designer of this set. MYTHICA is a different realm – every LEGO creature built in this world comes to life in this alternate universe. To access it a LEGOLAND, guests walk through a portal, which is recreated in this model with a straightforward but effective build. Stickers provide most of the detail on this section.

A couple of giant Venus fly traps depict some setting for the world beyond the portal, but it's Bits & Bobs, the friendly Alicorn, who

makes things interesting. When MYTHICA was designed, each animal was conceptualised in two versions – a LEGO brick version and a 'real' version. The LEGO replica in the set is exactly the same as it appears in the theme park.

The bulk of the build comes with Maximus

THE CHARACTER'S COLOURS ARE VERY ATTRACTIVE

the Sky Lion. When approaching the signature attraction in MYTHICA, Maximus is the land's jaw-dropping build that looks absolutely spectacular. In the ride, it is the Sky Lion who 'flies' guests through the various realms of MYTHICA.

Previous LEGOLAND exclusive sets have been

relatively quick and breezy. Maximus is in sharp contrast to that, using some clever detailing and sophisticated building techniques to get a really organic shape. The face in particular is really nicely shaped thanks to excellent use of slopes and other well-selected elements. The character's colours are also very attractive for display purposes – the bulk of the body and wings are in white, with shades of blue accenting it.

Given that MYTHICA only exists at LEGOLAND Windsor Resort, it's quite incredible that an exclusive set has launched based in this particular land – that's not a complaint though, as the original concept lends itself well to a build experience. That is has been executed to such a high standard is fantastic, with Maximus, Bits n Bobs and the portal making for a well-balanced model. ■



Maximus the Sky Lion.

Bits & Bobs is a charming character.

LEGO MYTHICA is a LEGOLAND realm.

Price: £13.49, \$14.99, €14.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 203

40545 KOI FISH

Does 40545 successfully interpret fish in the BrickHeadz format?

Words & Pics: Kat Rees-Jauke

KOI CARP ARE revered in Japan for their beauty and have since found their way into ornamental ponds across the world. Distinctly patterned in bright oranges, reds and black, these fish make attractive pets and can live for over a hundred years.

For anyone who has built 40442 Goldfish, then 40545 Koi Fish basically follows the exact same principle. The fish are square and built onto 4x4 baseplates, with some angled bricks for the fins. Where things start to differentiate is the markings. Koi come in a range of beautiful colours, which all have symbolisms in feng shui, and these use a mixture of printing and greebling.

Translucent rounded tiles imitate scales really well, and a 2x2 turntable element ingeniously makes the koi's mouth. Where 40545 is let down though is in the overall finish. These BrickHeadz are too small and blocky to look like koi. This isn't helped by the stand, which uses translucent blue 2x2 bricks to imitate water, but there's no depth to it. The blue just looks odd combined with the black baseplates all BrickHeadz use. Fish continue to prove a challenge in the BrickHeadz format.



VERDICT

These fishy friends are a nice concept but definitely not catch of the day.

50/100

Price: £13.49, \$14.99, €14.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 304

40546 POODLE

Is 40546 best in show or one for the doghouse?

Words & Pics: Kat Rees-Jauke

POODLES ARE RENOWNED for being the superstars of the dog world. While they are now known for being popular at dog shows, they were originally bred as water retrievers and make for exceptionally loyal family pets. Can 40546 Poodle strike a balance between these two sides of this dog?

If there's one thing that's iconic to poodles it's their curly coats. 40546 attempts to recreate the more showy side of the poodle, rather than the plainer coat most pet owners keep them in. This is achieved via lots of 1x2 bread-loaf tiles across the body, along with white studs to suggest the tight curls of the fur. A LEGO ball element even recreates a poofy tail on both poodles. It does make both dogs pretty but seems a little bit stereotypical.

This isn't helped by putting the poodles in dark pink collars featuring pearl-gold tags. For a line that's supposed to be celebrating pets,

40546 is emphasising the fashionable side of these dogs. Poodles can get muddy too. 40546 Poodle is certainly a nice model for fans of the breed, yet it doesn't really feel like a pet, and certainly isn't the best to come from the BrickHeadz Pets. ■



VERDICT

Another nice dog model for the Pets line, but 40546 should have really kept the focus on poodles as pets.

57/100

Price: £13.49, \$14.99, €14.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 253

40519 NEW YORK POSTCARD

Dimensional postcards are a new format for LEGO souvenir sets

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

THE LEGO GROUP has offered a number of different location-specific souvenirs for those who visit brand stores in touristic locations, with the last format being fridge magnets. These new postcards are even more relevant for a holiday memento, as they take the classic two-dimensional image and turn into a dimensional scene.

This new postcard format shares a rough concept with the Architecture Skyline series, but here scale has been thrown out of the window altogether, instead aiming to get as many New York icons into one scene as possible – there's One World Trade Center, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, a NY taxi and a ferry. The bridge is a little strange as you're building it, but makes perfect sense when it is placed onto the model at an angle.

If you're in the LEGO Store New York and want a souvenir, this is a neat set and great value. What's more, now these international models are sold at LEGO.com, so you can also order it from the website.



VERDICT

The bridge is particularly effective in this neat little set.

60/100

Price: £13.49, \$14.99, €14.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 276

40654 BEIJING POSTCARD

Different scales blend together in this LEGO brick postcard

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

AN INNOCUOUS LITTLE set that would have started the year without anyone noticing has become the subject of fan interest as it was originally intended to be released as 40520 Beijing Postcard. This new version is identical to the original (which made it as far as production), except the sticker and elements used for the Chinese flag have been removed.

Much of 40654 depicts the Great Wall of China and does a masterful job doing so – it starts off as a row of 2x2 ingots on the brick-built backdrop, then becomes a dimensional build that sits on the base of the model. The illusion is really convincing, helped by just how iconic the landmark is.

Some beautiful pagodas contrast nicely with the brick yellow Great Wall, with the dark turquoise a nice choice to complement the red and gold.

Anyone who has made a trip to Beijing and would like a LEGO tribute to the city is likely to enjoy this colourful model. ■



VERDICT

Forced perspective is cleverly used in this build.

58/100

IT'S ONE OF THE MOST MIND-BENDING
LEGO ELEMENTS EVER CREATED

The loading
area includes
on-ride photos.



Loop Coaster is
an absolutely
towering set.



Price: £344.99, \$399.99, €399.99 / **Minifigures:** 11 / **Pieces:** 3,756

10303 LOOP COASTER

When a theme park introduces a new ride, it has to offer fresh thrills – this LEGO coaster does just that with its enormous double loop

Words & Pics: Daniel Konstanski

BACK IN 2018, 10261 Roller Coaster arrived with the new track platform and blew minds with its size, fluid motion and intricacy. It was a masterpiece and ushered in a new era, opening up build opportunities never before possible. Following it up must have been an intimidating design brief. Fortunately, the LEGO Group had an ace up its sleeve in the form of a new part for facilitating geometries not seen before – loops.

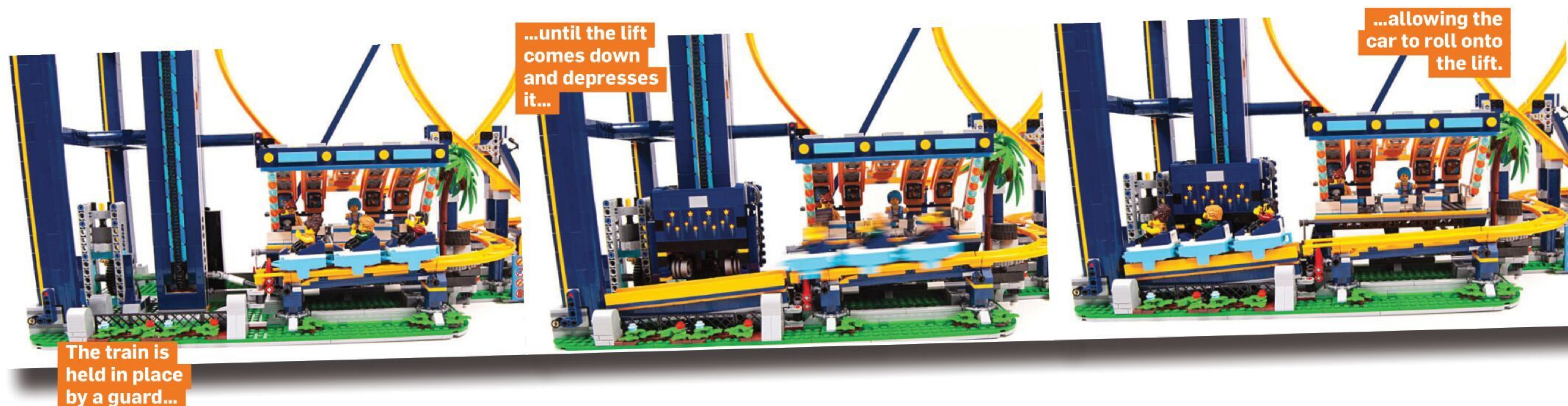
10303 Loop Coaster's namesake features are created by two different combinations of elements. The key to both is a new quarter circle track element that both bends up and curves horizontally at the same time. It's one of the most mind-bending LEGO elements ever created and can be confusing to connect it at first. Four of these components attached in sequence create a 360-degree circle that is offset by four studs horizontally from beginning to end.

To keep things from becoming repetitive, designers employed some incredible building techniques to flip two existing sloped track elements

and pair them with two of the new loop elements to create an upside-down teardrop shape. However, the new parts don't stop there.

In addition, a sloping 90-degree curved track element has been added to the platform. The original 90-degree curve was perfectly flat, whereas this new component also slants so that the coaster car can change vertical position as well as horizontal while going around it. This part was vital for the top of the hill, where the car needs to generate enough speed so that it can overcome gravity while rounding the loops. From the lift, two of these new slanted curve components provide the giant drop's starting slope.

The enormous hill and drop are Loop Coaster's defining features, the namesake loops notwithstanding. It's a towering construct, on par with other mega tall LEGO structures like the 10237 Tower of Orthanc or 71040 The Disney Castle. Loop Coaster's single train is lifted to that lofty peak by a chain lift mechanism that raises a slightly sloped section



An impressive 11 minifigures are included.



The loops are two different shapes.



of track so that, when it crests, the train rolls off onto the curved slope that brings it to the vertical drop.

The line-up for the drop is achieved through more amazing track geometry that sees two standard curves flipped sideways. It's a marvel of LEGO maths that it all lines up. 10303's chain lift has a counterweight, and the chain can slip thanks to two different link sizes being incorporated. Wider chain links raise the lift, then slip past. The drop is slowed through the offset of a counterweight that rides up and down a separate vertical stretch of track. The whole mechanism is operated by a rotating knob that can also be motorized in a manner similar to the original Roller Coaster.

Loop Coaster's towering hill is awe inspiring, but is also the set's greatest liability. Such massive height makes the model inherently unstable, especially when being moved. One

of 10261 Roller Coaster's most surprising and impressive traits was how strong it was. Despite being massive in size, the whole ensemble could easily be picked up and moved without so much as brick shifting. This

LOOP COASTER'S TOWERING HILL IS AWE INSPIRING, BUT IS ALSO THE SET'S GREATEST LIABILITY

was possible because the width of its base compared to height was, roughly, equivalent. Of necessity, Loop Coaster's height far outstrips its base's width meaning that it is incredibly top heavy. This led to some... issues when trying to

move it.

Exacerbating that inherent instability is that fewer Technic elements have been used than were in the first coaster. A bunch of beam, holes and pins would have ruined Loop Coaster's clean look, but that choice makes the whole tower a bit less sturdy. This isn't a problem when Loop Coaster is sitting on a table, but moving it even a little can result in disaster.

Instability, however, is a minor gripe when the functionality is this awesome. Turning the crank elevates the coaster train to the top of the hill at which point it wooshes down the vertical track at breakneck speed. More than sufficient velocity is achieved to whip around both loops like a Sonic the Hedgehog wannabe. A brief bit of return track takes the train back to near the station at which point the mechanical wizardry continues.



A wheel mechanism similar to that which got the first coaster track around the flat part of its hill automatically spins when Loop Coaster's crank is turned. This pulls the train into the station. Next, when the lift automatically drops back down thanks to the different size chain links described earlier, it depresses a red guard that keeps the train from rolling forward until the lift is in position. Thanks to how long the chain is, there is plenty of time for the car to roll into place before the lift engages to bring it up for another plunge down the hill and through the loops.

Real amusement parks make their various rides distinctive colours to help visitors easily distinguish between them. Designers here opted for a gorgeous dark blue and dark yellow combination that looks awesome. Furthermore, the high level of detail that has been a hallmark of all the fairground sets, but especially the last few, continues here. Pathways connect the

VERDICT

Thanks to several new parts for facilitating loops, this model successfully stands apart from its predecessor.

86/100

gate and stairs. A camera sits ready to snap photos of riders on the loop, with hilarious upside-down images emblazoned on stickers in the waiting area to match.

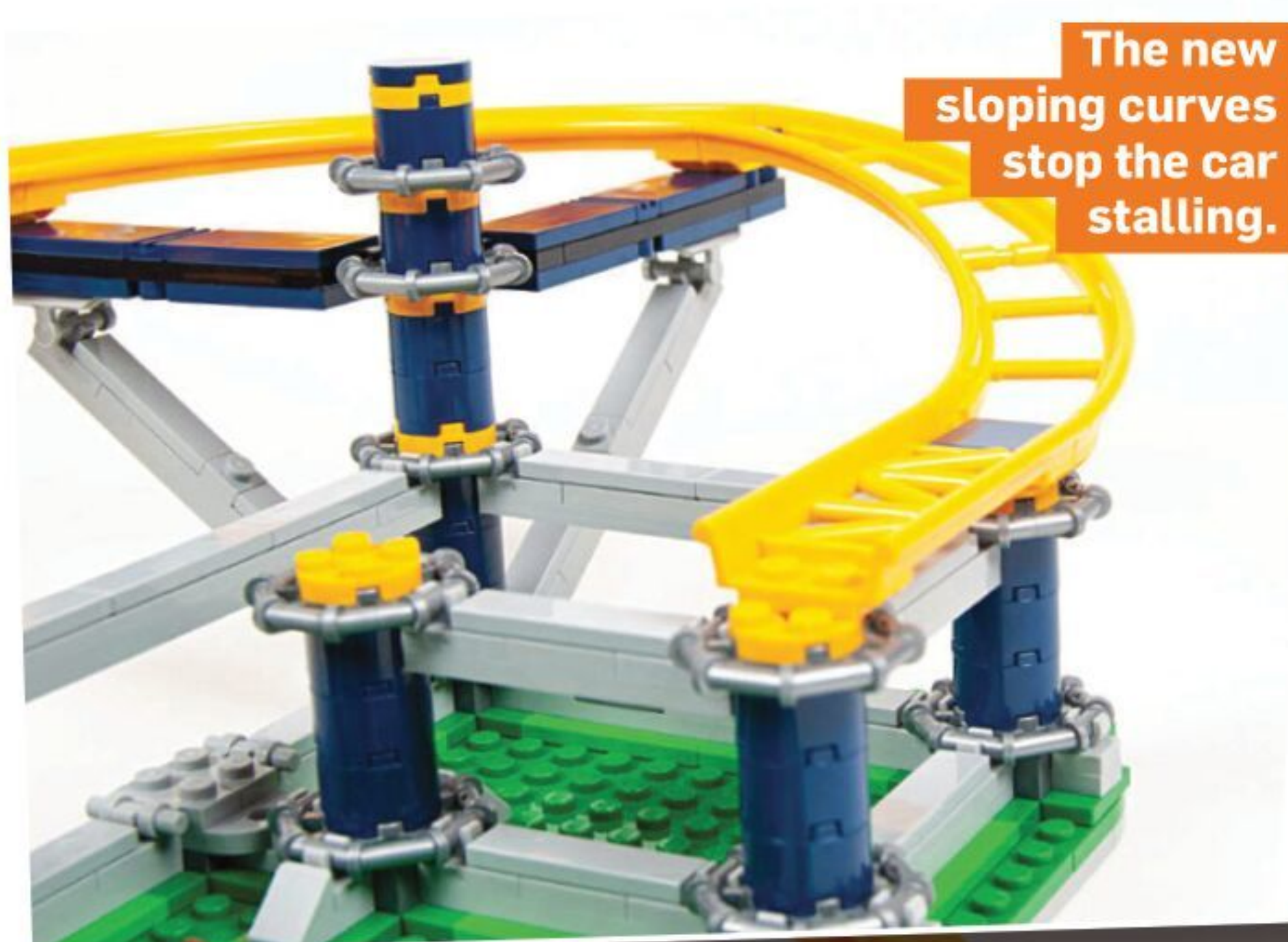
Loop Coaster's entrance bears its name and a height measurement graphic which is, humorously, taller than child minifigures. Since they can't sit, that would be a problem as the lap bar wouldn't hold them in while going around the loop. A map shows the growing amusement park with past sets depicted surrounding Loop Coaster. Beneath one of the supports a child has lost their balloon and the

young boy minifigure has a sad face to match – or perhaps he just discovered he is too short to ride.

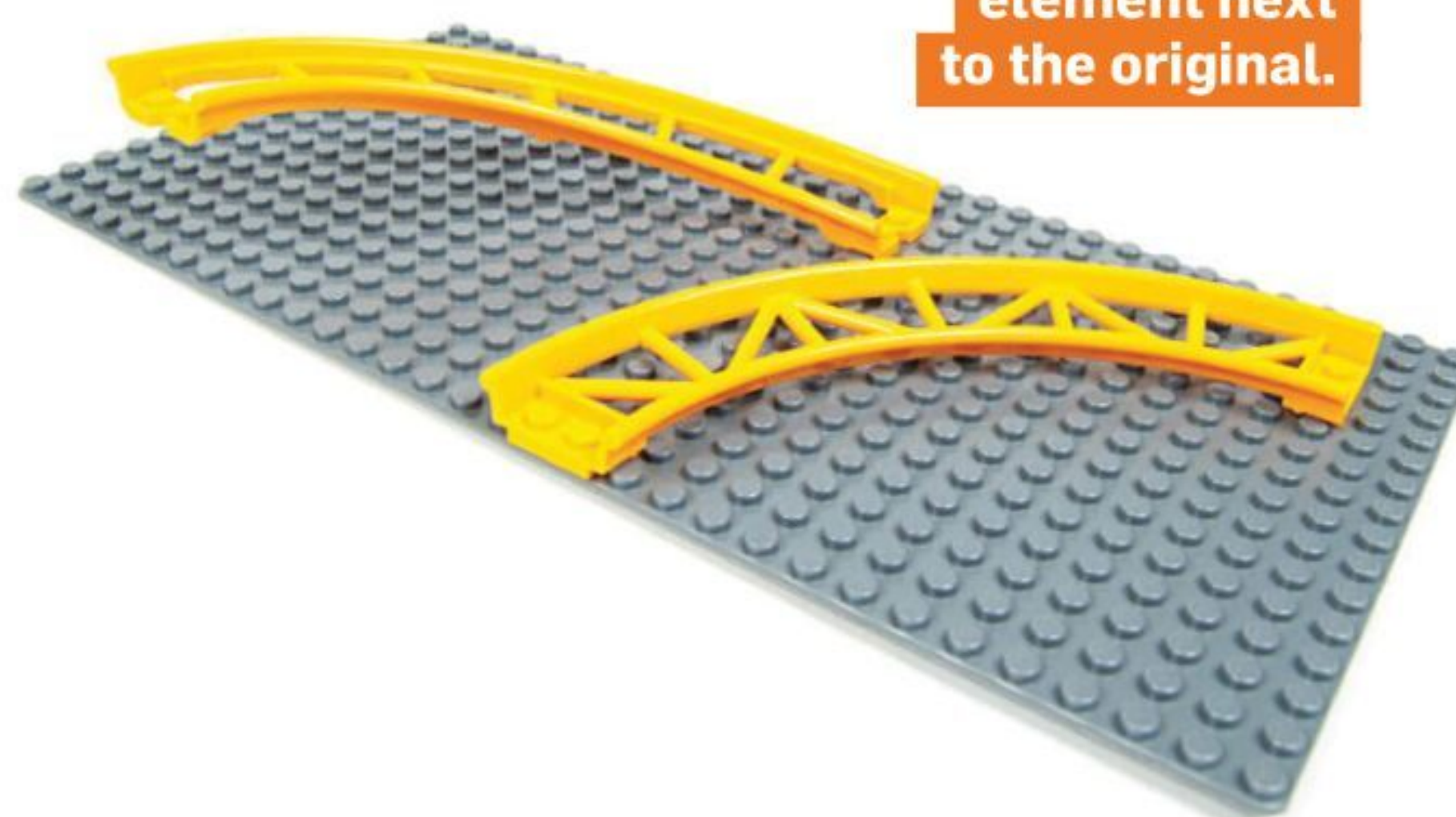
An impressive 11 minifigures are included in the set. Several vendors have carts selling balloons, pretzels, and hot dogs along with an employee to operate the ride. Remaining figures are devoted to park visitors and more than enough are included to fill both the train car and the waiting area.

Loop Coaster is a masterpiece. The original Roller Coaster was impressive, but 10303 is even more so. The precise geometry of the supports, unique track arrangements and towering height provide a masterclass in how to build. Anyone considering the set should be aware of the potential for disaster, so keeping the model on a large table is the safest option. The LEGO design team has hit it out of the amusement park with this one, delivering all of the thrills you could hope for. ■

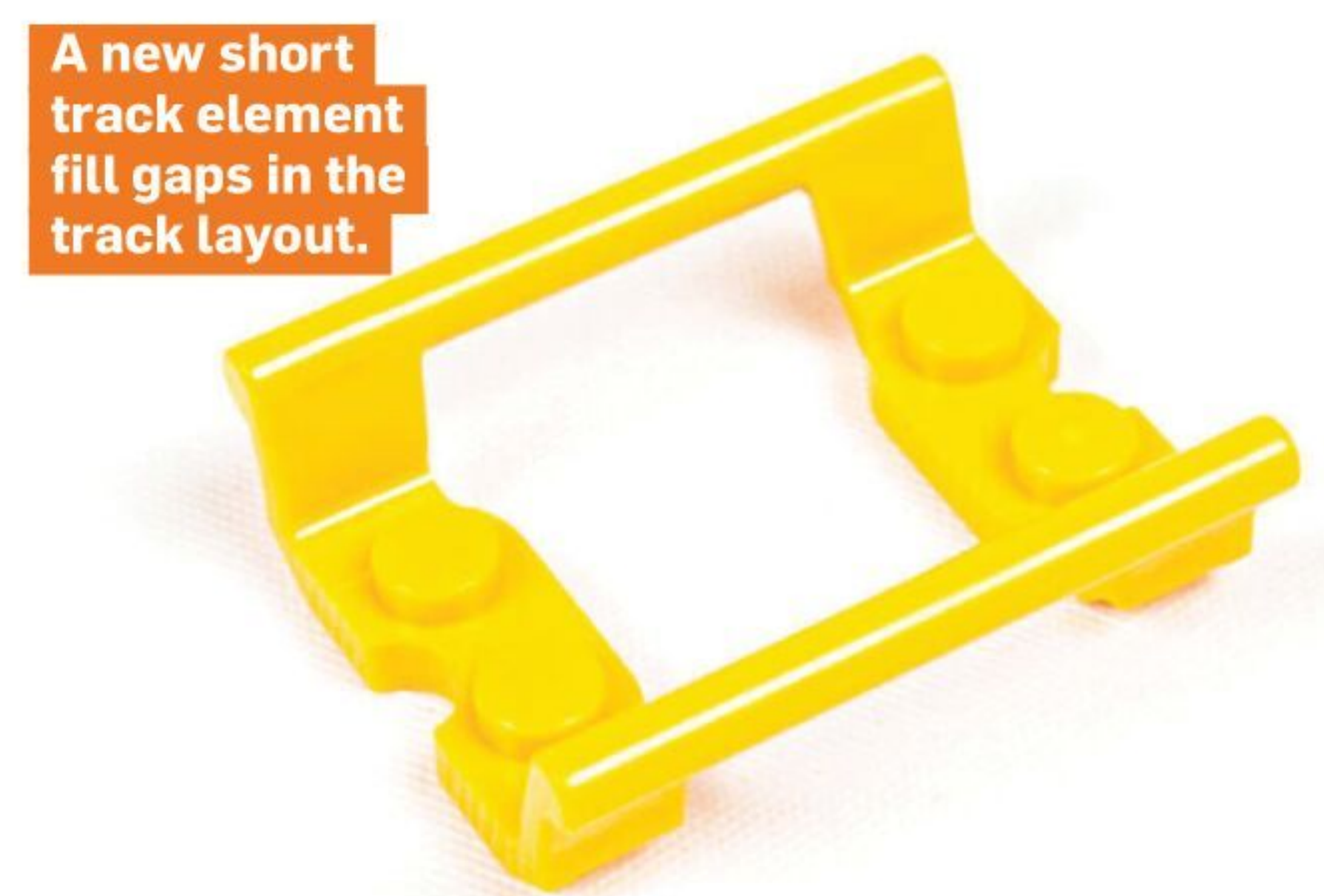
IT'S A TOWERING CONSTRUCT, ON PAR WITH OTHER MEGA TALL LEGO STRUCTURES



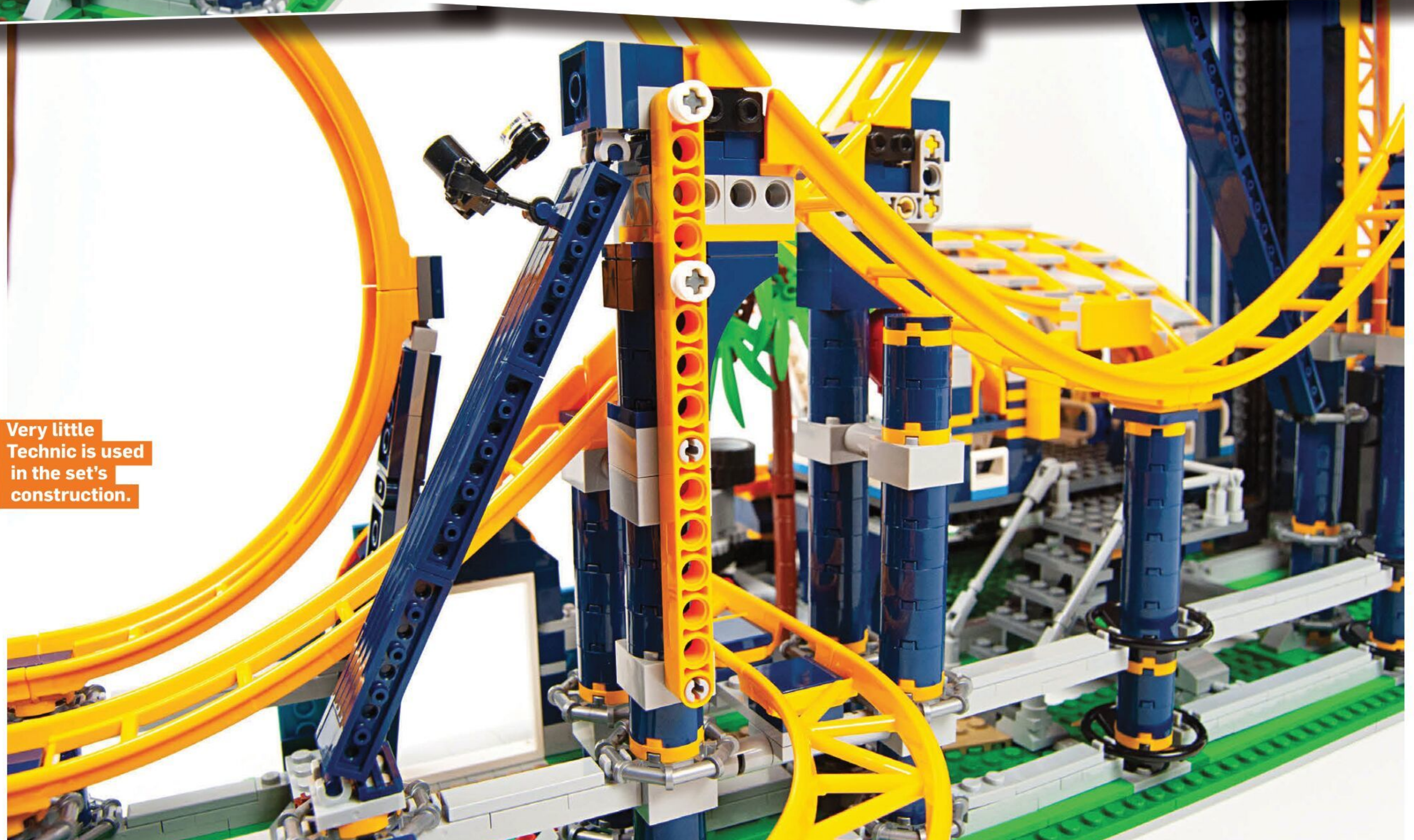
The new sloping curves stop the car stalling.



Sloping curved element next to the original.



A new short track element fills gaps in the track layout.

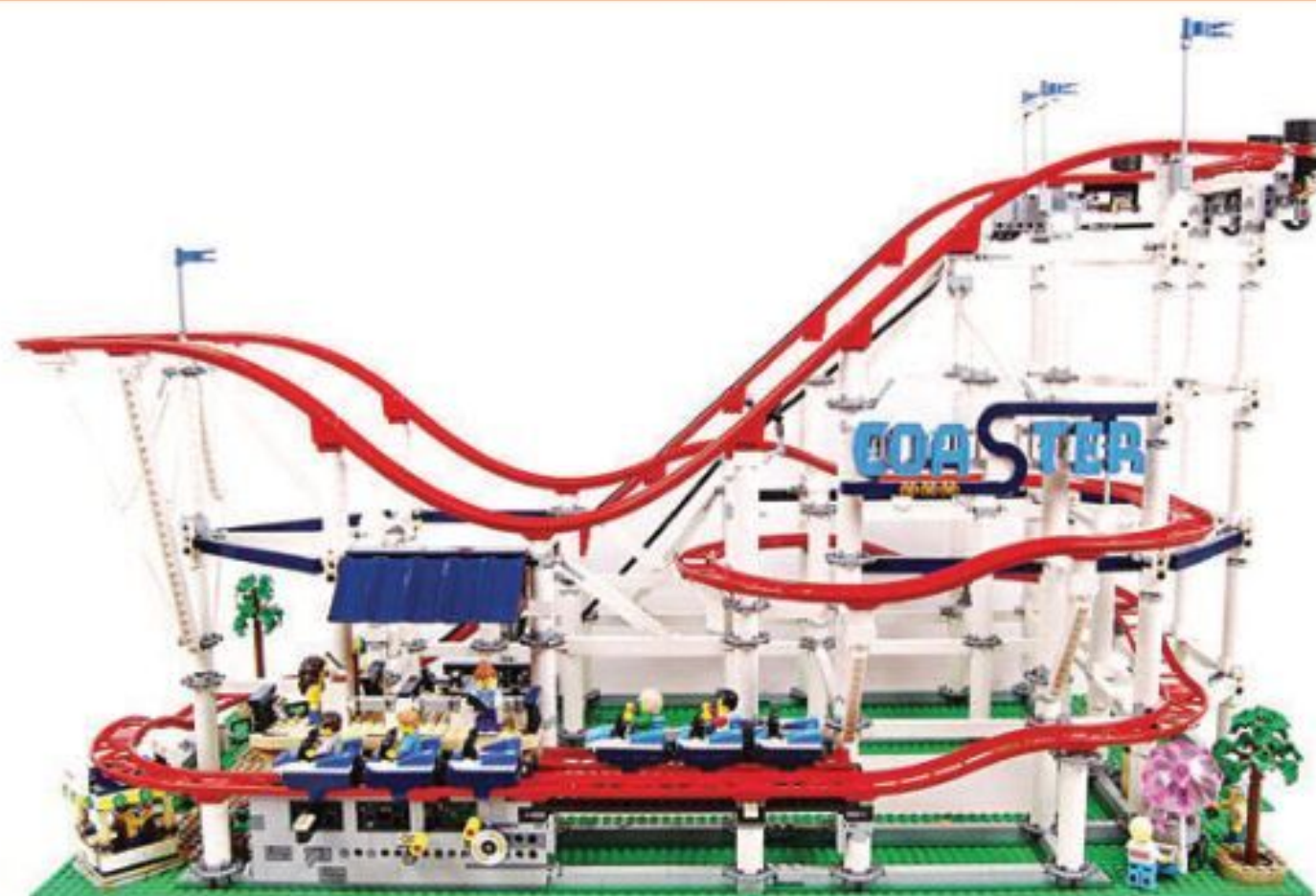


Very little Technic is used in the set's construction.



ESSENTIALS

YOU MAY ALSO WANT...



10261 Roller Coaster introduced the coaster track system and would look perfect sitting along Loop Coaster in a LEGO Fairground layout.

BRICK SPOTLIGHT



The new curved slope element is the foundation for creating 10303 Loop Coaster's distinctive loops.

TECHNIQUE SPOTLIGHT



Four of the new curved slope elements create a perfect loop that is offset by four studs from start to finish.

BRICK SPOTLIGHT

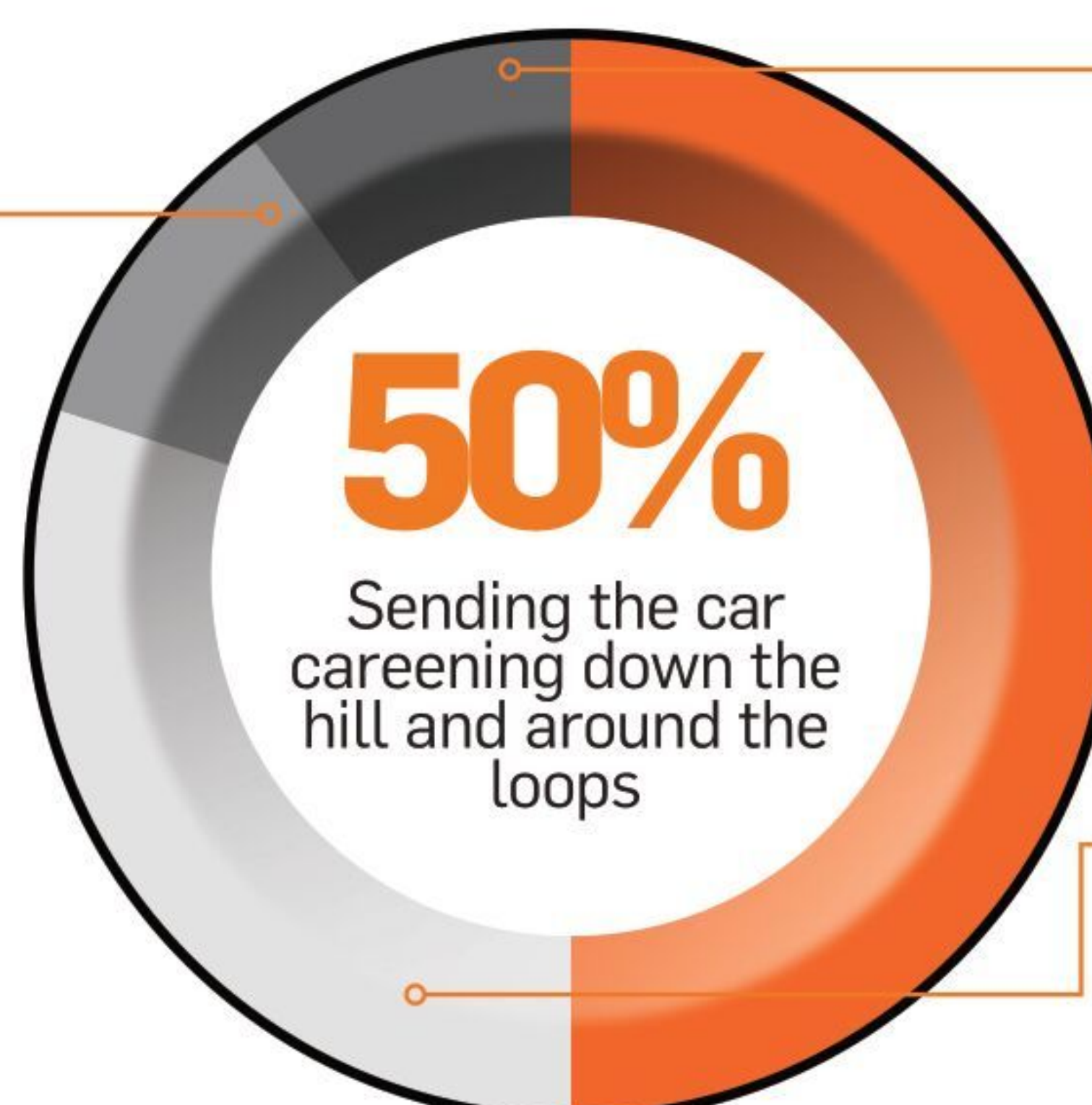


Strictly speaking, the map is a sticker rather than a brick, but this attractive graphic shows the new coaster alongside previous sets in this fairground series.

HOW YOU'LL SPEND YOUR TIME WITH 10303

10%

Putting it back together after trying to move it



10%

Sneaking the child minifigure onto the ride when the operator isn't looking

30%

Marvelling at how the various sections of track line up

Price: £30.99, \$36.99, €32.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 541

40574 LEGO BRAND STORE

Who wants a LEGO set of the shop that only sells LEGO sets?

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

VERDICT

If you want a LEGO Store for your layout, you'll need to get stickering.

52/100

GIVEN HOW SILOED the LEGO Group tends to be as a company, it's almost certain that this model was conceived of and designed independently to the BrickLink Designer Program's 910009 Modular LEGO Store – although it's hard not to see this as a miniature version of that enormous model.

Neither that limited edition set nor this LEGO Store exclusive are the first sets inspired by the brand retail locations though. Traditionally, LEGO Store sets were free at grand openings, until 40305 LEGO Brand Retail Store arrived in 2018.

This set very much feels like an update/replacement for 40305, following a very similar format. It's a two-storey building that includes

many of the hallmarks of LEGO Stores, including the Pick a Brick wall and Minifigure Factory.

Some touches make this feel like an adult

COLLECTORS ARE UNLIKELY TO BE TOO DISAPPOINTED

model, such as the tiled interior floor that feels entirely unnecessary. Other aspects feel much more targeted at a casual consumer, such as the amount of detail conveyed through the many – and sometimes inaccurate – labels (in real life the Minifigure Factory is a stand-alone machine,

not built into the wall).

Building the mini models is enjoyable, although it's surprising to see 71040 The Disney Castle selected as one of the window displays, especially as the other seems to be based on a classic train. Even more confounding is the decision not to give this multi-storey building a roof (this is generally better than 40305, but that set did have a roof).

A LEGO Store set is likely to be a novelty buy rather than a significant collection enhancing purchase, which means collectors are unlikely to be too disappointed by this pedestrian model – although even the most patient sticker-applier might roll their eyes when the second sheet falls out of the box. ■



Price: £34.99, \$39.99, €39.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 680

40521 MINI DISNEY THE HAUNTED MANSION

Conjure up 999 happy haunts by building their beloved retirement home

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

WHILE ALL DISNEY theme park attractions have their fans, few are as diehard as those who adore The Haunted Mansion. The home to 999 happy haunts is one of the quintessential Disney rides, a classic that demonstrates what a perfect attraction looks like. It's an experience that no-one wants to miss during a Disney trip.

It therefore makes sense that this is the follow up to 40478 Mini Disney Castle. Unlike that prior set though, this one is not inspired by Orlando's Walt Disney World but California's Disneyland. It was there that the original Haunted Mansion opened in 1969. While the attraction is also found at other Disney parks, the exterior is distinct at each location.

To get the scale of the model right, the designers have employed plentiful SNOT building. There'll be a layer or two of plates stacked flat, then separate little stacks of plates that inserted sideways to get the windows at the

right size. It's very effective but a little repetitive.

When building at this scale, element choice is vital – and pieces have been selected extremely well here. There are moments during the construction when you'll find it hard to believe certain parts weren't designed specifically for

WHEN BUILDING AT THIS SCALE, ELEMENT CHOICE IS VITAL

use in this model.

The back of the model is open, revealing a small interior. It's here that the most iconic scene from the ride – the spooky ballroom where the ghosts are enjoying a swinging wake.

There's the dining table, the candelabra and a few ghouls. Stickered tiles on the back wall are portraits of fan favourites from the ride including Madame Leota and the Hitchhiking Ghosts.

If you asked any Disney theme park fan what minifigures they'd like from The Haunted Mansion, it's almost certain that the Hitchhiking Ghosts would top the list, but there's only space for one minifigure in the set. As a result, the slot goes to the Disneyland Cast Member who escorts you into the house. While a ghost would have been more interesting, it's a very well executed minifigure.

Every Disneyland fan might like to own a large-scale LEGO Haunted Mansion (at least until the space it would take up becomes apparent), but for the time being this 680-piece set is what's on offer. It's an attractive and accurate depiction of the ride's exterior; a solid follow-up to Cinderella's Castle. ■

VERDICT

Foolish mortals might find the build a bit repetitive, but it results in an accurate depiction of The Haunted Mansion.

64/100

Ghostly butlers welcome guests to the house.



It's time to meet your Ghost Host.

The ballroom is where the ghosts appear first.



Price: £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 408

75334 OBI-WAN KENOBI VS. DARTH VADER

Does the LEGO reunion of master and apprentice build in enough tension?

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

LIGHTSABER DUELS HAVE always been a tricky thing to depict for the LEGO design team. They're an absolutely essential part of Star Wars, delivering much of the action as well as important character moments. 7257 Ultimate Lightsaber Duel is a good example of a model that tried to deliver both the setting and the necessary play feature but was a pretty flimsy set that didn't satisfactorily achieve either goal. Surprisingly, 75334 Obi-Wan Kenobi vs. Darth Vader brings that set to mind, in that there are too many bricks here.

It depicts the scene from Obi-Wan Kenobi in which Darth Vader attempts to burn his former master in revenge for what happened on Mustafar. The drama in the scene comes from the interaction between Vader and Kenobi – the setting is dull by storytelling standards, and exceptionally dull by the standard of Star Wars.

Despite that, the designers have you build a large base for the minifigures, which is raised off the surface by a couple of bricks' height in order to bury a function beneath. As seen on screen,

it's grey.

The main function delivers the most arresting part of the scene, as sliding the floor back slightly allows flames to pop up between the two characters – this works very well. Those flames are complemented by two pieces of equipment around the edge that Vader uses to source the fire. To complete the scene, there's

THE SETTING IS EXCEPTIONALLY DULL BY THE STANDARD OF STAR WARS

the rocky ridge that Tala fires from to save Obi-Wan.

Two circular platforms are included to turn Obi-Wan and Vader on – but there are no levers to operate them, so their inclusion is strange; it's just as easy to manipulate the minifigures directly as it is to turn the platforms.

VERDICT

An bland, overpriced model with excellent minifigures.

47/100

What makes this model so strange is that in recent years, the LEGO Star Wars team seemed to notice that a lightsaber duel set doesn't need to be overly engineered; 75310 Duel on Mandalore, 75269 Duel on Mustafar and 75236 Duel on Starkiller Base all provide everything required for such a model. 75334 Obi-Wan Kenobi vs. Darth Vader includes an unnecessary amount of terrain and is based on the less interesting of the streaming series' two big confrontations.

Of course the minifigures are absolutely excellent, so you'll likely end up buying this set for the characters – Obi-Wan Kenobi looks like he's been through the wringer, while NED-B has an excellent new part that captures the shape of the droid beautifully. Tala's good too and there's a new Anakin face underneath Vader's helmet.

75334 provides one of the least interesting locations in Star Wars, but with a compelling minifigure line-up for anyone who enjoyed the Obi-Wan Kenobi series..

Vader Force lifts Kenobi.



Price: £29.99, \$29.99, €34.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 282

75333 OBI-WAN KENOBI'S JEDI STARFIGHTER

Let's hope that Obi-Wan has packed a poncho for his visit to Kamino

Words & Pics: Graham Hancock

OBI-WAN'S ORIGINAL JEDI Starfighter is back. This year marks the 20th anniversary of Star Wars: Attack of the Clones (yes, really [insert exasperated sigh]). That movie has gotten the short shrift from the LEGO Group, because many of the sets based on the vehicles that appeared in it have focused on The Clone Wars animated television series.

The last version of this set only came out in 2017 – while LEGO set design always improve, there's only so much difference in the space of five years, and 75333 is heavily influenced by 75191 Jedi Starfighter with Hyperdrive.

As you'd expect for a model of this size, it's an enjoyable, pacey build, with the central section coming together before the mirrored side sections are constructed. As with many designs from the prequel trilogy, which had a modernist design style, the Jedi Starfighter is trickier to

replicate with LEGO elements than a functional looking ship like an X-wing.

That means that the smooth shaping of the vehicle has been sacrificed in favour of angled side sections and that the slope towards the

THE JEDI STARFIGHTER IS TRICKIER TO REPLICATE THAN A FUNCTIONAL LOOKING X-WING

cockpit is exaggerated – the cockpit bubble itself is also too pronounced. It's entirely clear what this starship is, but it's interesting to see the original 2002 set is still the best version in certain aspects.

VERDICT

A serviceable Jedi Starfighter doesn't offer an upgrade over previous releases.

64/100

If you already have either 7143 or 75191, you have a version of Obi-Wan's ship that has certain advantages over this one, making this seem an inessential upgrade. The inclusion of a new Obi-Wan Kenobi and more importantly a Taun We minifigure make it much more difficult to skip.

Taun We does a great job of capturing the 1950s science-fiction vibe of the Kaminoans, with the clean white-and-blue outfit delivered across the torso and dress elements. Naturally, to convey the elongated neck and uniquely shaped head, a special part has been created that does the job well.

Minifigure fiends will therefore have to grab this set, as will those collectors who don't yet own this memorable Attack of the Clones ship. It's not exactly the upgrade fans would have hoped for though, instead just offering some special modifications on the last release. ■



HALL OF FAME

The sets you need in your collection, according to Blocks reviewers

1

10294 Titanic

i Theme: For Adults / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 88



That Titanic has been executed at this size with such a solid and detailed set is remarkable.

100/100

2

21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay

i Theme: Ideas / **Year:** 2020 / **Issue:** 67



Combines the nostalgia of classic Pirates with a sophisticated building experience, for a true LEGO masterpiece.

100/100

3

10265 Ford Mustang

i Theme: Creator Expert / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 55



Easily the coolest car to come out of the Creator Expert theme, the Ford Mustang fine-tunes LEGO vehicle design to perfection.

100/100

4

76139 1989 Batmobile

i Theme: DC Super Heroes / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 64



An incredible way to celebrate Batman's twin anniversaries in 2019, this is the greatest LEGO Batmobile.

99/100

5

76391 Hogwarts Icons – Collectors' Edition

i Theme: Wizarding World / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 83



These Harry Potter props are a delight to build, but really impress thanks to the final model's exceptional visual composition.

99/100

6

70620 NINJAGO City

i Theme: The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 36



There are few sets that can compare to NINJAGO City's size, scope and almost overwhelming level of detail and technique.

98/100

7

10257 Carousel

i Theme: Creator Expert / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 34



This welcome addition to LEGO fairgrounds is a work of art, and far more detailed than its much-revered predecessor.

98/100

8

21317 Steamboat Willie

i Theme: Ideas / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 56



This monochromatic blast from Disney's past doesn't need any sprinkling of pixie dust, as it's pure magic from start to finish.

98/100

9

70904 Clayface Splat Attack

i Theme: The LEGO Batman Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 28



A creative and effective build that ensures a wide and valid appeal. Proof that great things come in small packages.

98/100

10

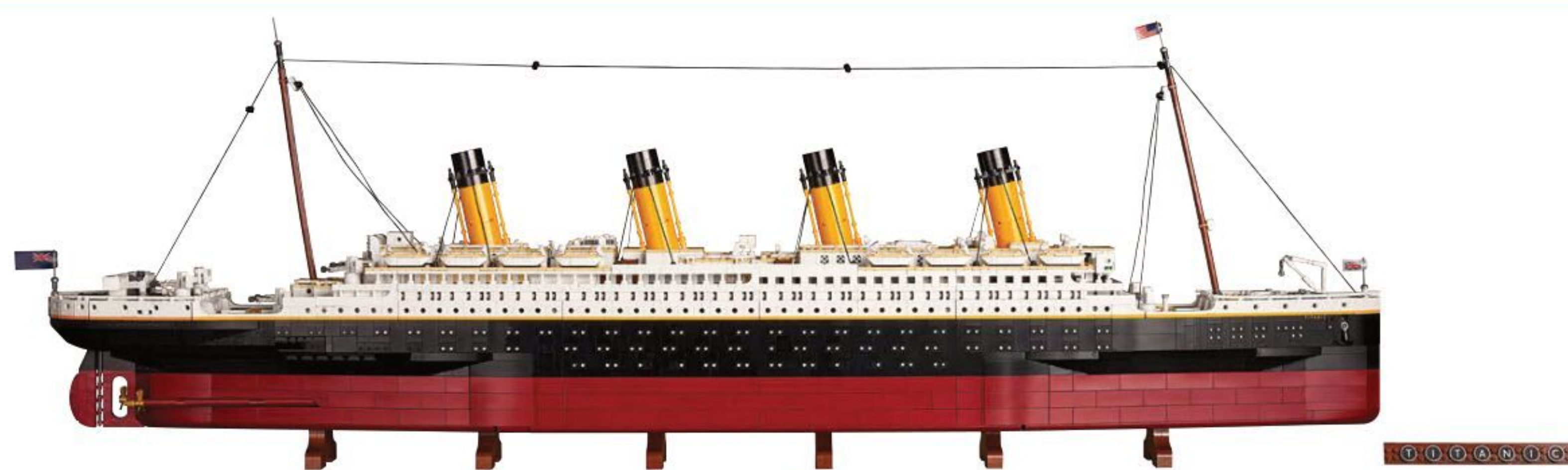
75313 AT-AT

i Theme: Star Wars / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 87



The Ultimate Collector Series AT-AT justifies its incredible piece count and delivers a toy that lives up to what fans have dreamed of.

97/100



11

71741 NINJAGO City Gardens

Theme: NINJAGO / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 77



This beautiful and detailed model is a worthy follow-up to 70620 NINJAGO City, using its incredible piece count to excellent effect.

97/100

12

70618 Destiny's Bounty

Theme: The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 36



A highly detailed and exquisitely-designed vessel (with not a moulded hull in sight) for the full roster of ninja to enjoy.

97/100

13

10305 Lion Knights' Castle

Theme: Icons / **Year:** 2022 / **Issue:** 94



Nostalgia and history combine for a beautiful set that demands to be played with.

96/100

14

10497 Galaxy Explorer

Theme: Icons / **Year:** 2022 / **Issue:** 94



The size of 10497 Galaxy Explorer has been increased to make every adult who builds it feel like a child again – and it succeeds.

96/100

15

75192 Millennium Falcon

Theme: Star Wars / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 40



A nearly perfect immortalisation of the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy – as long as you can stomach the size and price.

96/100

16

10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander

Theme: Creator Expert / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 58



A timely and worthy celebration of a historic event, the Lunar Lander is a stunning display piece and rewarding build.

96/100

17

80105 Chinese New Year Temple Fair

Theme: Seasonal / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 65



This is a beautifully-presented set with no cut corners, no lack of attention to detail, and absolutely no reason to not pick it up.

96/100

18

76052 Batman Classic TV Series – Batcave

Theme: DC Super Heroes / **Year:** 2016 / **Issue:** 19



Offers an unrivalled Bat-experience, with plenty of Bat-love having gone into the Bat-design phase. Did we mention Bats?

96/100

19

70841 Benny's Space Squad

Theme: The LEGO Movie 2 / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 53



The question isn't whether you should buy this colourful celebration of Classic Space, but how many copies is enough.

96/100

20

10274 Ghostbusters ECTO-1

Theme: Ghostbusters / **Year:** 2020 / **Issue:** 75



A fantastic build experience that leads to a superb display set. I ain't afraid of no complex techniques.

95/100

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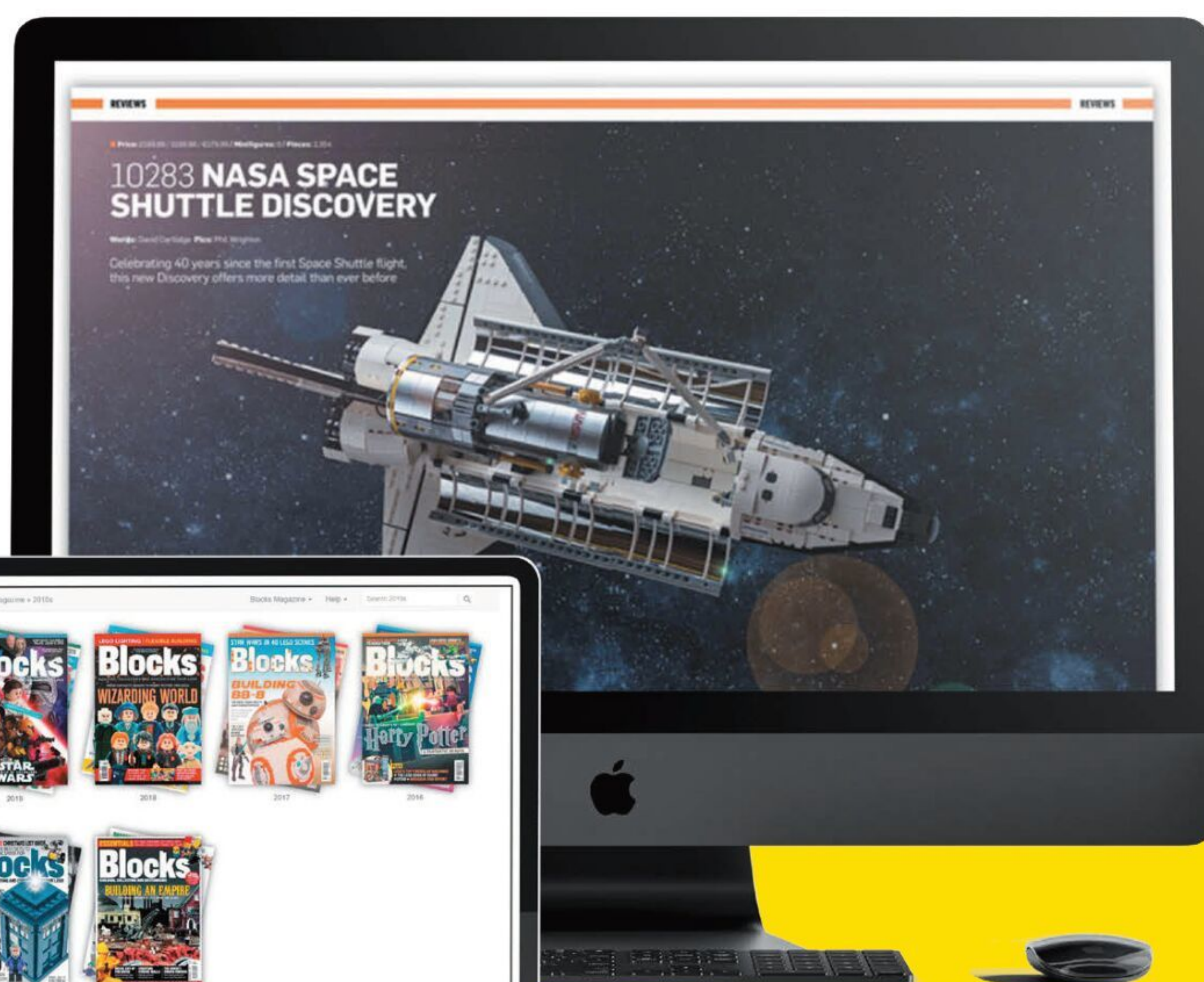
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MOD SQUAD AT-ACT

Get ready to crush the Rebel Alliance on Scarif by transforming the UCS AT-AT into the AT-ACT

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

■ ■ TRANSFORM THE AT-AT
INTO THE AT-ACT ■ ■

75313 AT-AT.

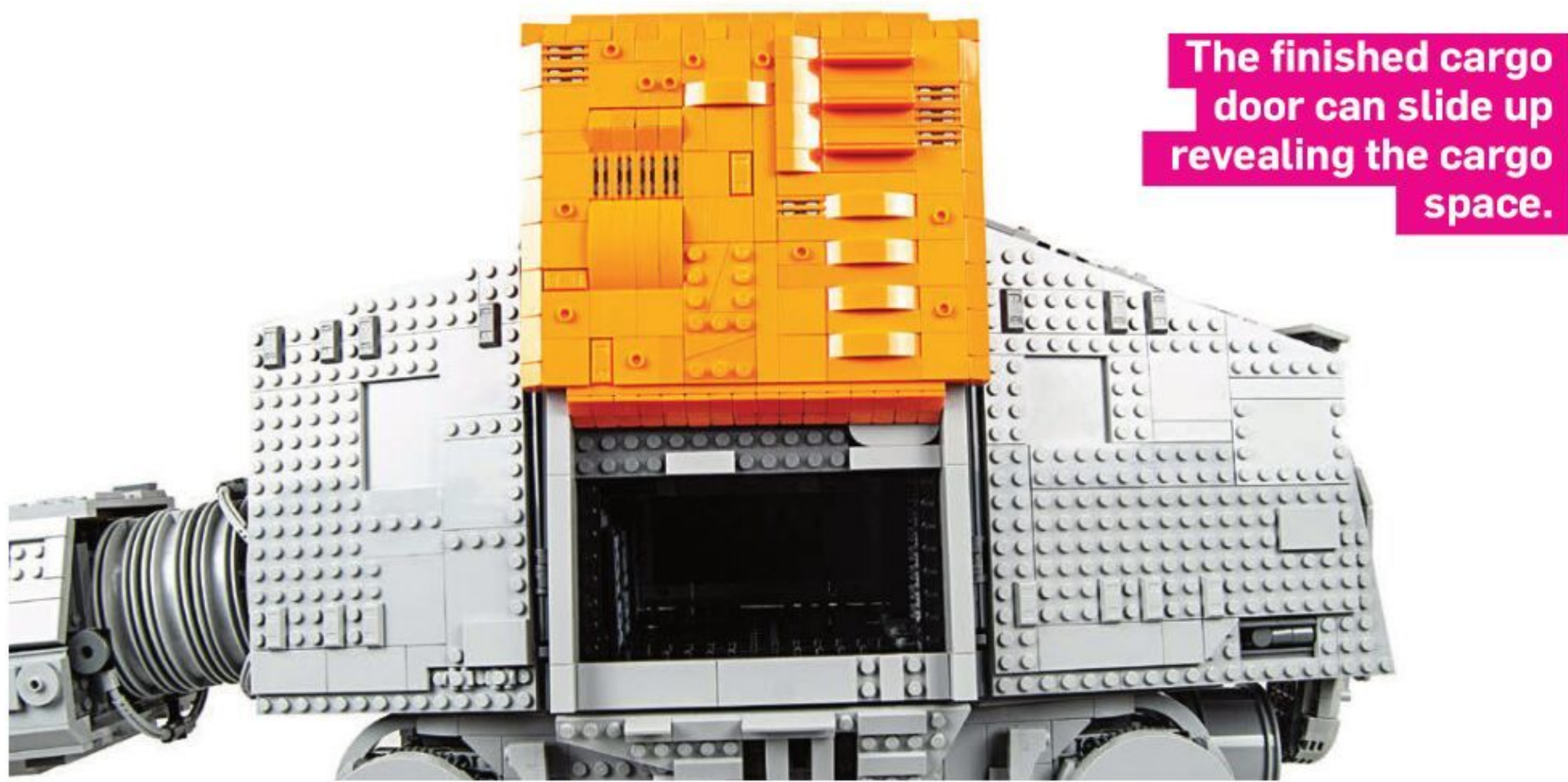
The AT-ACT was introduced in Rogue One.



CASSIAN ANDOR IS back, in his own Star Wars series on Disney+. In typical fashion for the galaxy far, far away, we know the character's fate already, having seen him go out in a blaze of glory after transmitting the Death Star plans from the Empire's facility on Scarif.

During that epic battle in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, audiences were introduced to the towering AT-ACT – or All Terrain Armoured Cargo Transport. While similar to a standard AT-AT, it features a modified body with cargo door and dedicated bed for transporting materials and equipment on Imperial construction sites. In keeping with this more domestic role, its head is kitted out with fewer weapons and a different viewport for pilots.

If you've had 75313 AT-AT on your shelf for a while – or if you're looking to acquire the incredible Ultimate Collector Series (UCS) model – then this is a great way to get more out of the official set. Follow these steps to transform the AT-AT into the AT-ACT and have an incredible centrepiece for a *Rogue One* display. Don't forget to add some terrified Rebel minifigures looking up at it!



To achieve this, the head must be modified to depict the different shape of the AT-ACT's more accurately. The cargo door will be added along with sliders that allow it to raise and lower, revealing the cargo bed within the walker's interior.

HEAD – BOTTOM

Begin by disconnecting the head of the official model. This can be done by pulling the pin where the neck meets the head, then pulling on the head itself to disconnect the Technic pins. Doing so allows easy access to the bottom, which makes the first part of the mod easier. For those who would prefer not to disconnect the head, it is possible to do the build with everything attached, just more awkward. Remove the chin guns to expose the plates and then start building back up as shown.

1

The base of this section is 12 studs in length.

2

Combine these elements as shown.

3

This construct goes at the front.

4

Use 12 inverted slopes here.

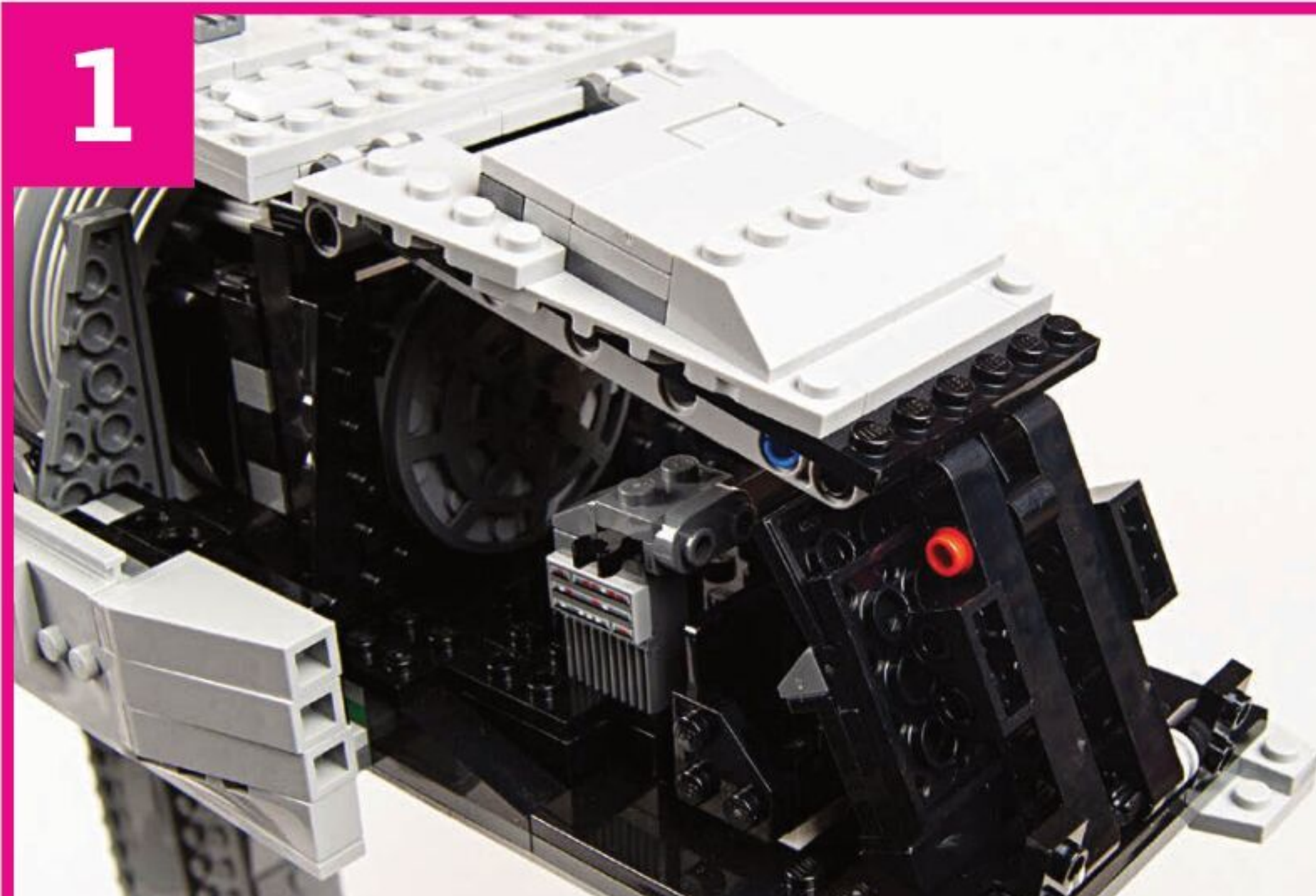
5

Attach this construct where the chin guns used to be.

HEAD – TOP

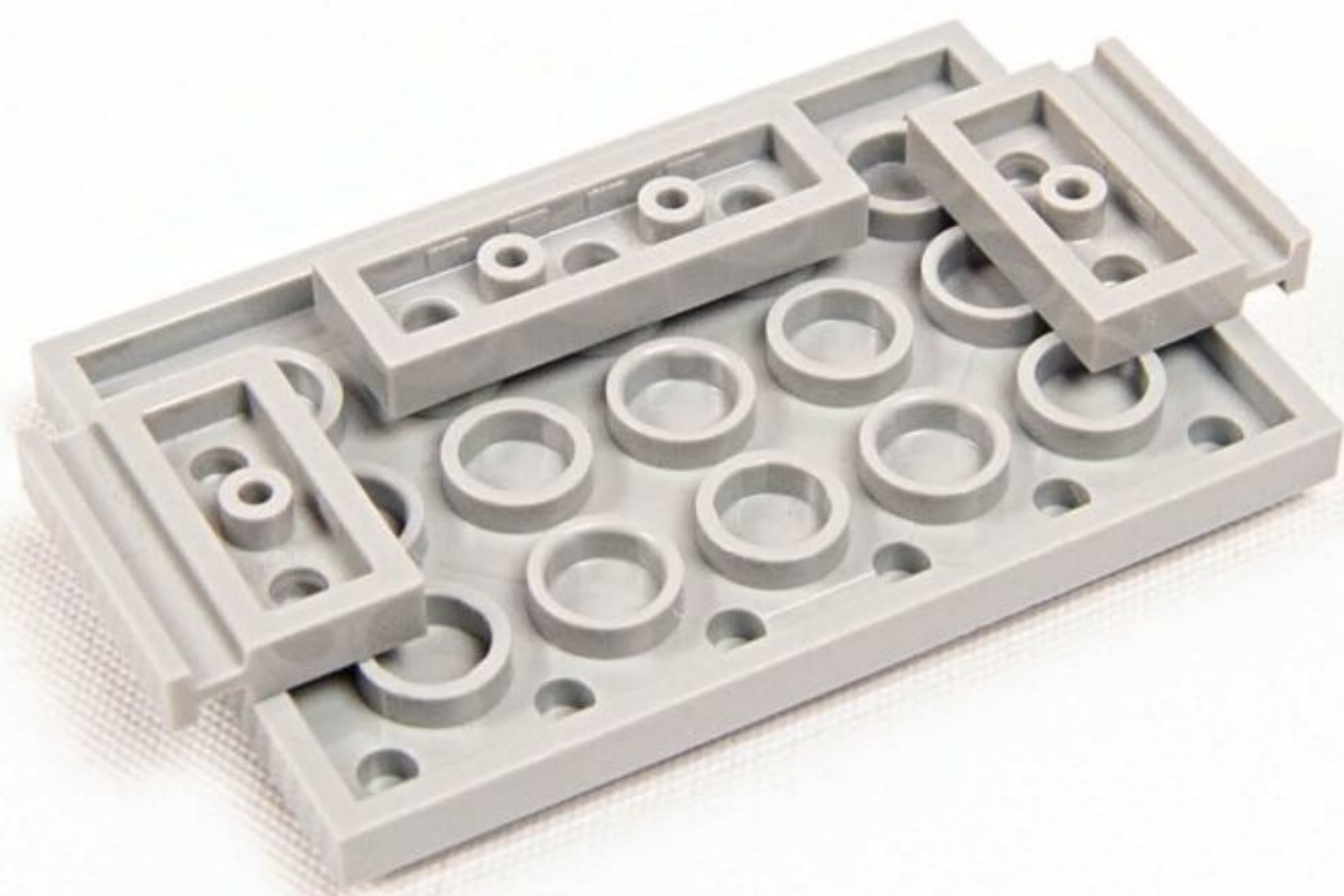
The head can now be reattached. One of the key visual differences between the standard AT-AT and an AT-ACT is the shape of the head at the front. While much of the back and sides of each are the same, their viewports and nose areas differ. An AT-AT has a protruding viewport and nose area that slopes back toward that viewport, while the AT-ACT has a more recessed viewport and nose that slopes out. Conveniently, the superstructure of the UCS AT-AT's head can easily support this change without having to modify the underlying structure, all that is required is swapping out some of the plating.

1



Strip the official model down until it looks like this.

2



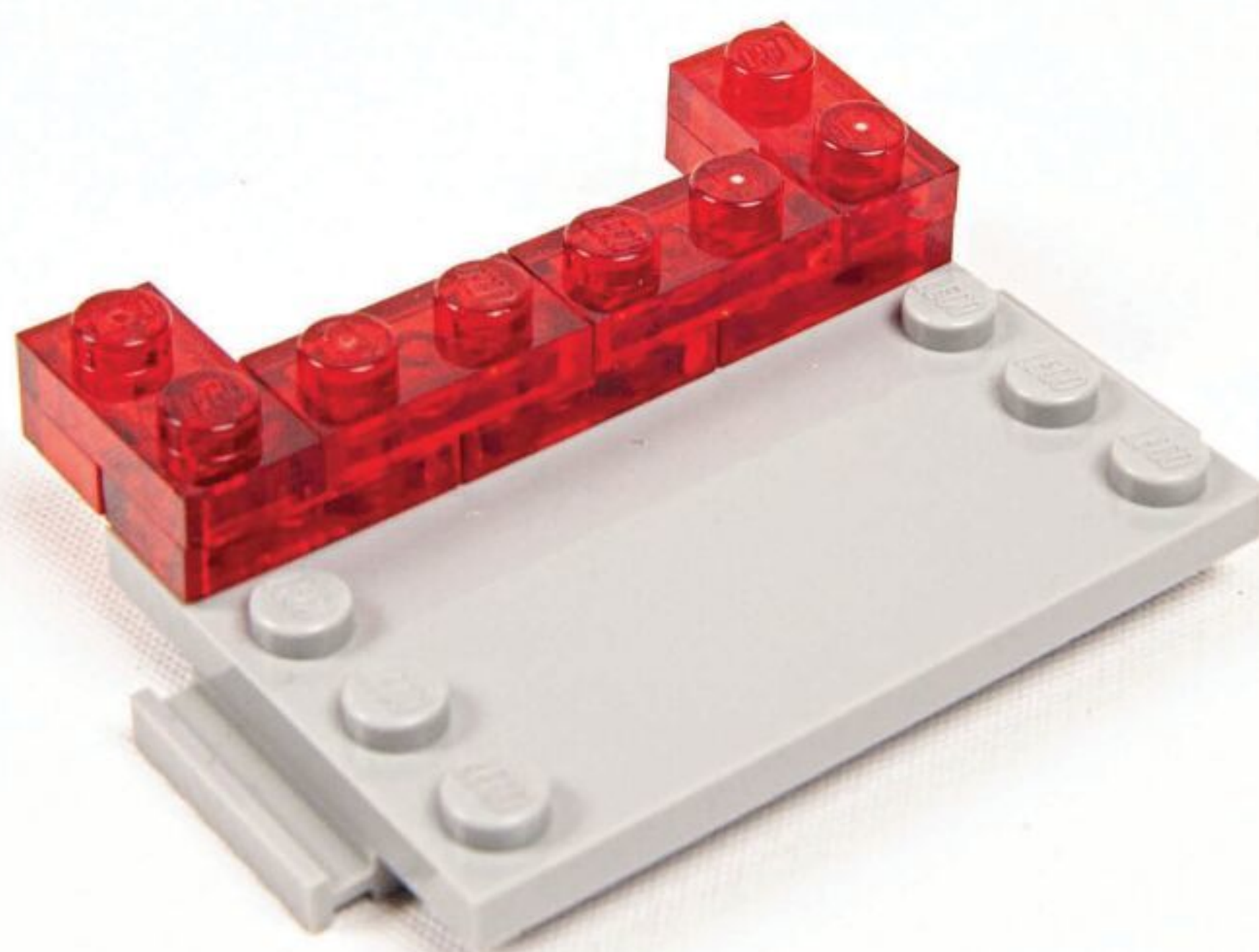
Attach these plates underneath.

3



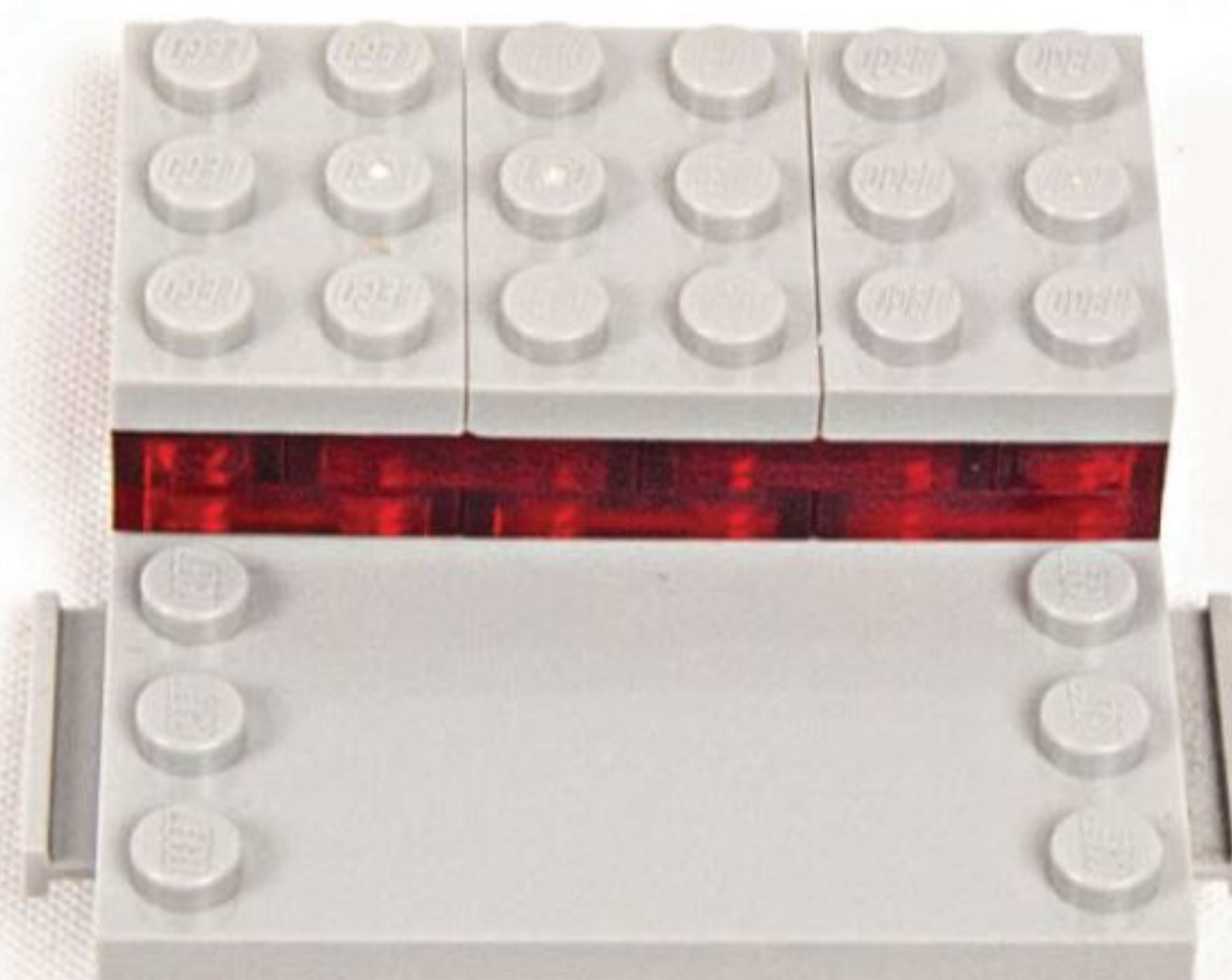
Use a modified 4x6 plate as the base.

4



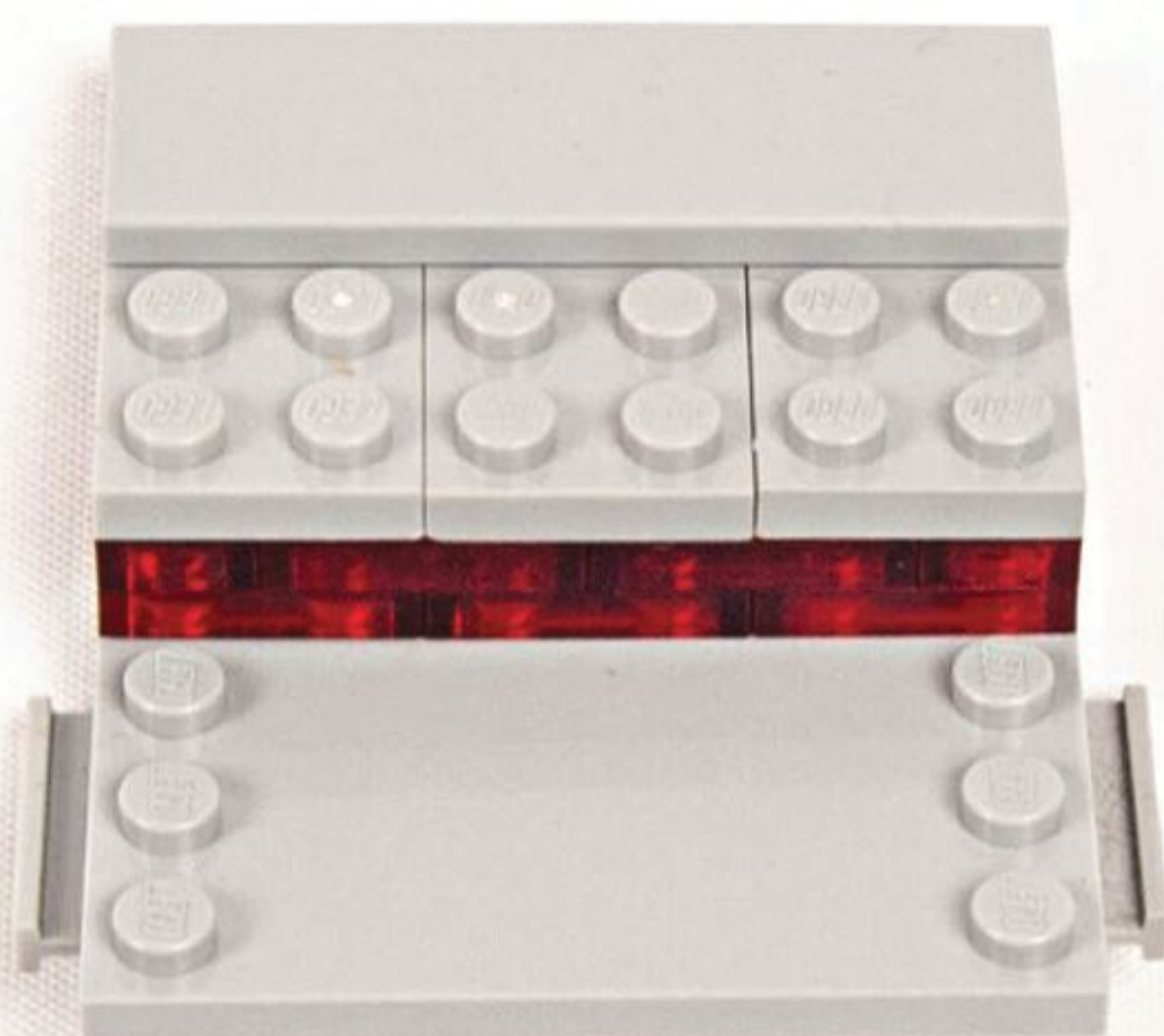
Two layers of trans-red plates form the new viewport.

5



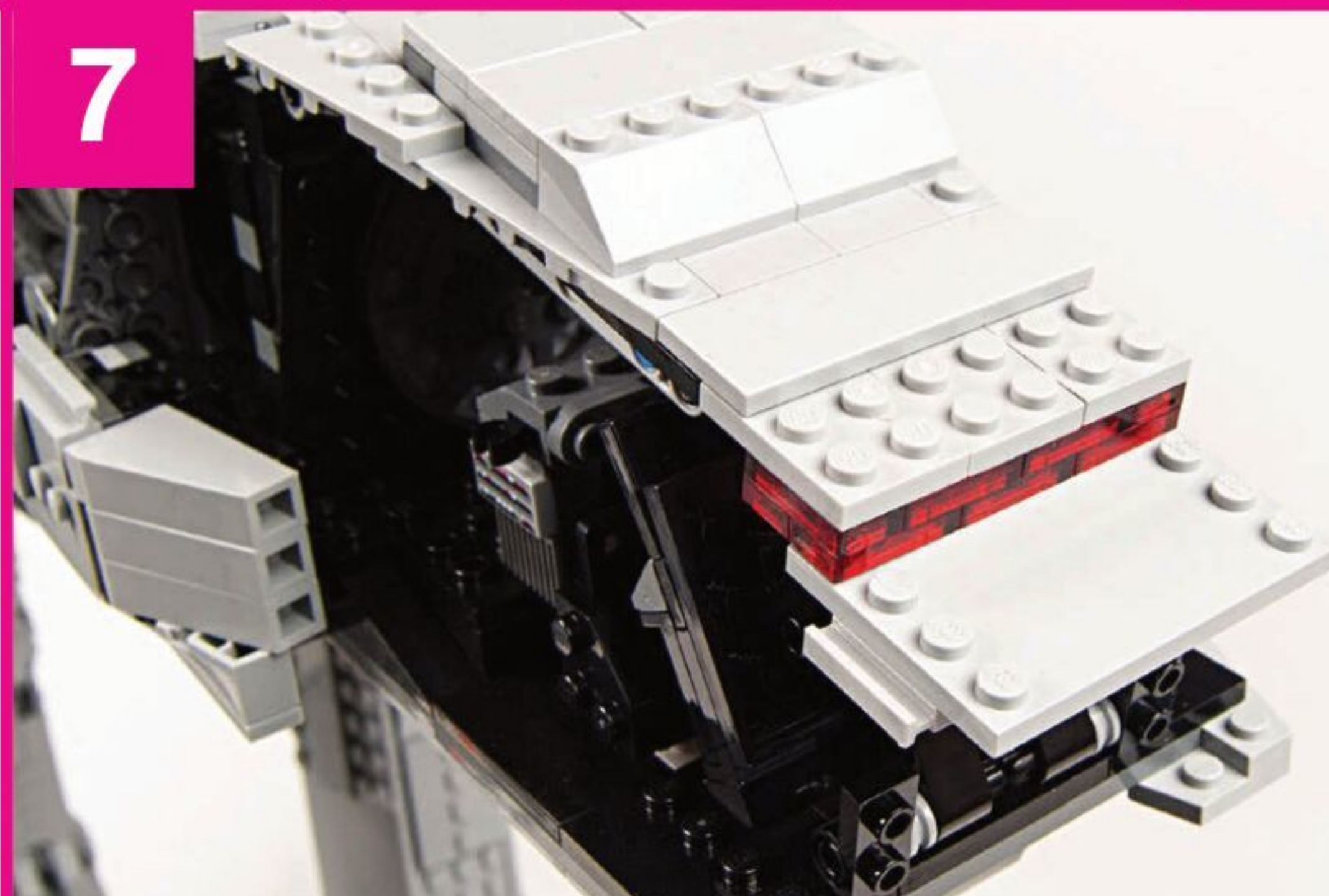
Add three 2x3 plates on top of the transparent red ones.

6



Then the 2x6 tile from the official set.

7



Attach the construct back to the main build.

8



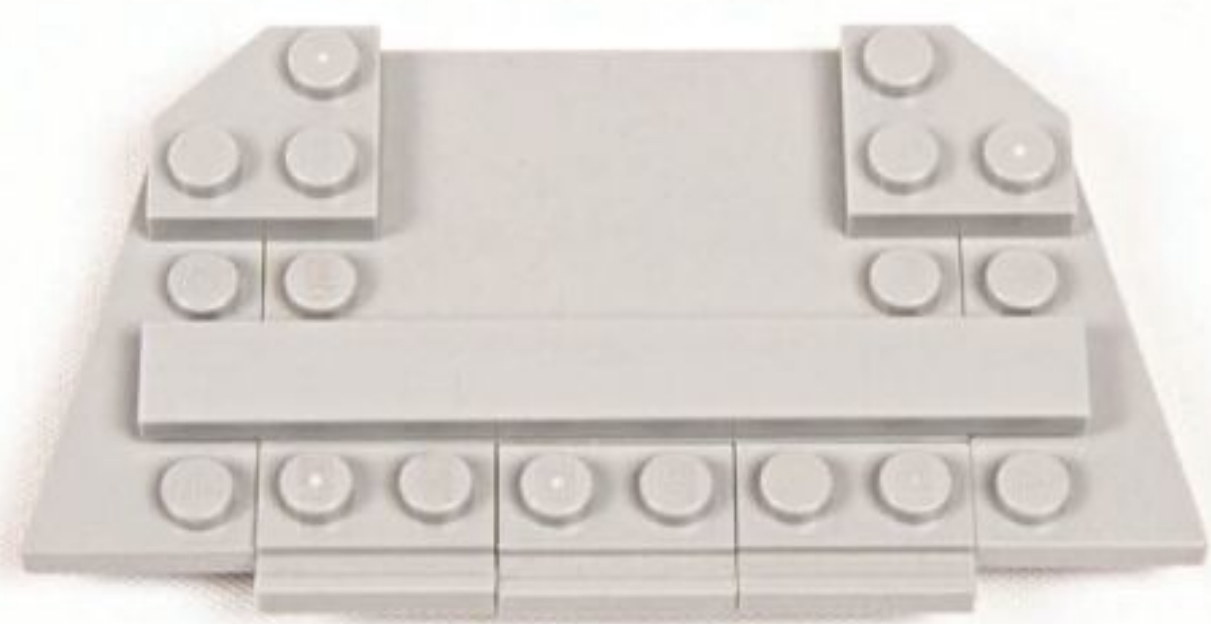
This construct will be the new protruding nose area.

9



Here is the top view.

10

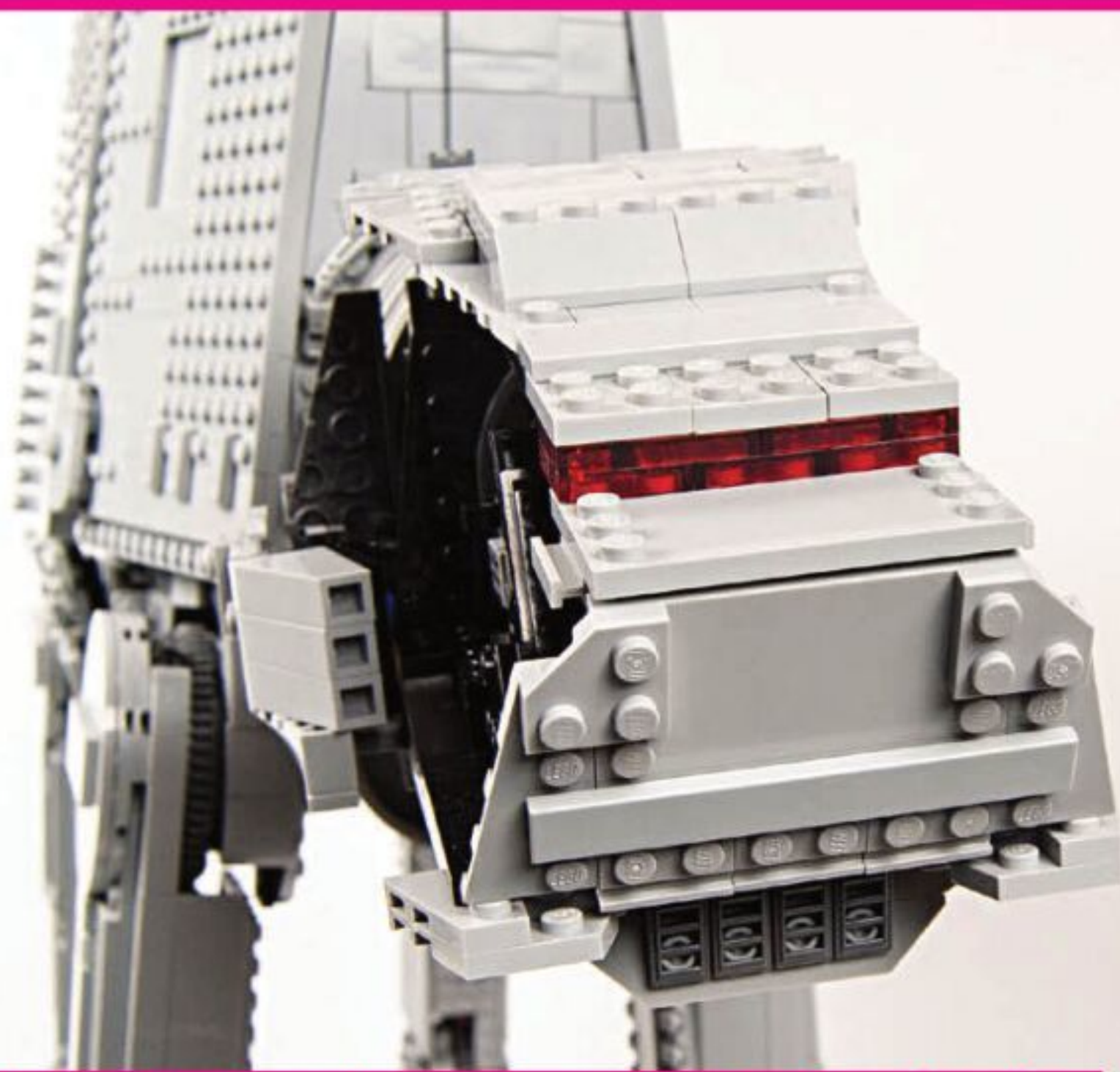


Small wedge plates give it the proper shape.

HEAD – SIDES

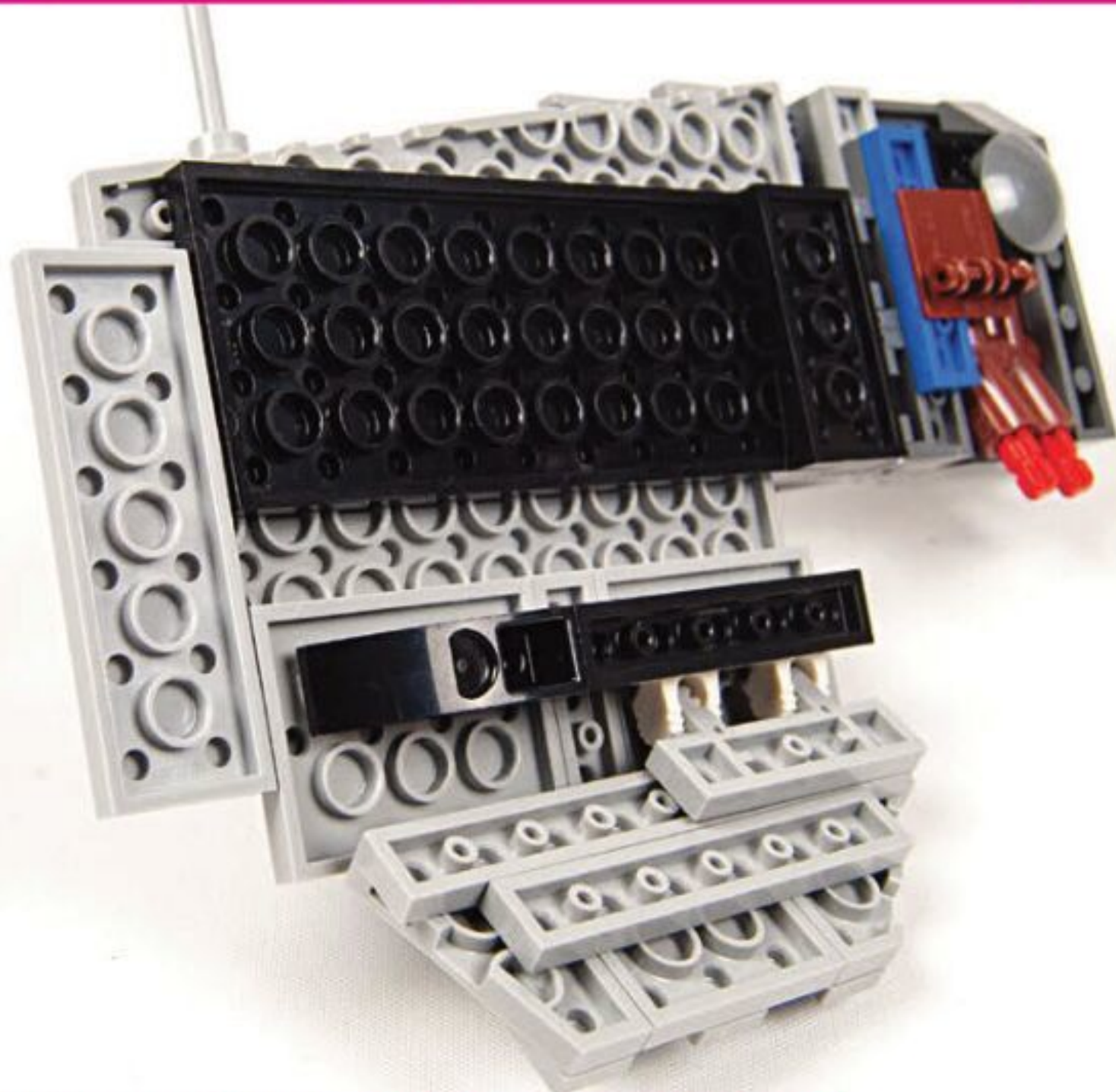
The final step in modifying the head is tweaking its two sides. The AT-ACT maintains its more war minded cousin's large guns, as discovered by the poor Rebels in Rogue One, so these do not need to be changed. However, the different shaped viewport and nose necessitate extending each side to achieve the proper shape. Each side is done the same way, so just mirror the instructions to get both.

11



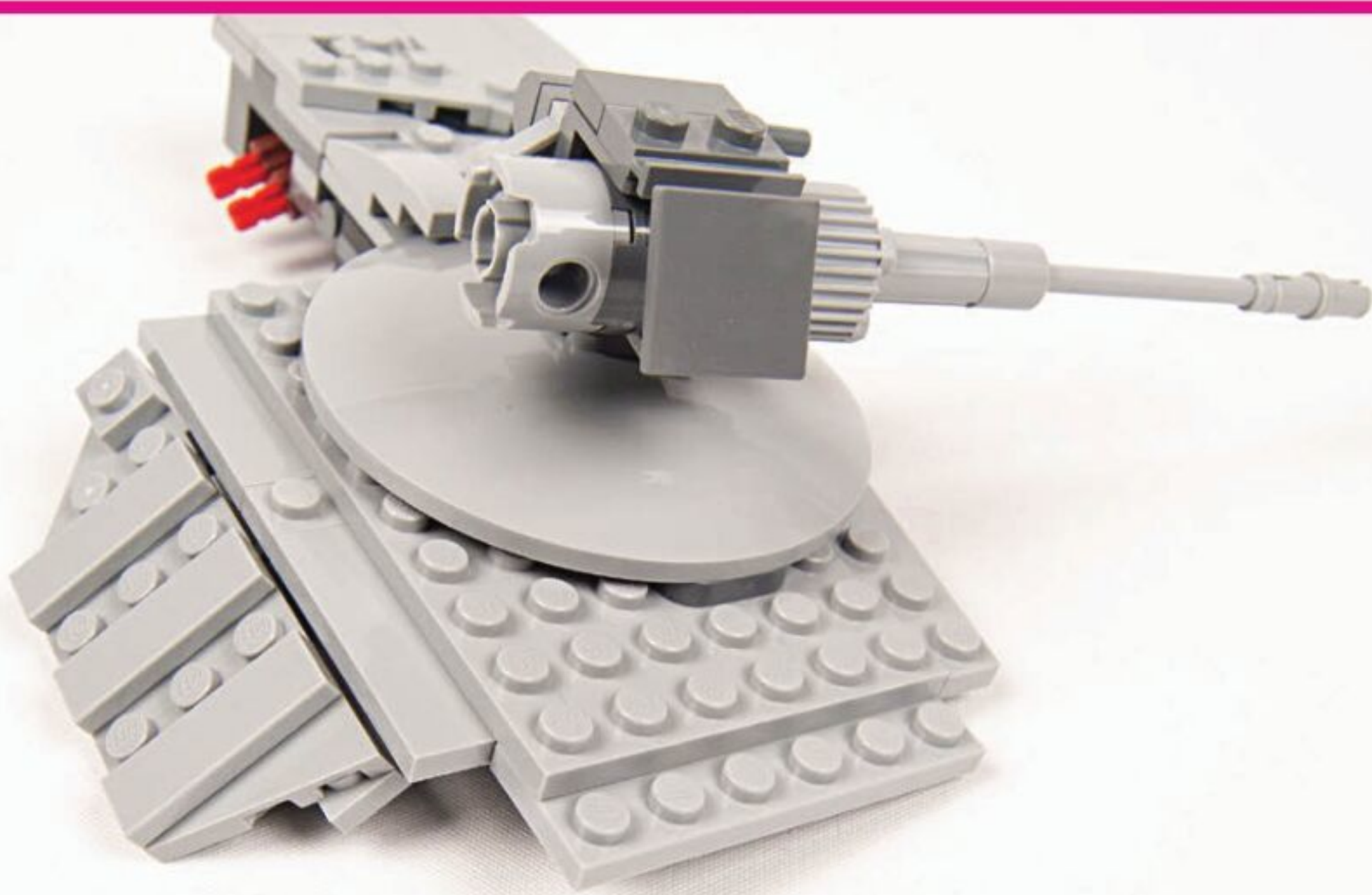
Attach to the original anchors, sloped out rather than in.

1



Disconnect each side and strip it down as shown.

2



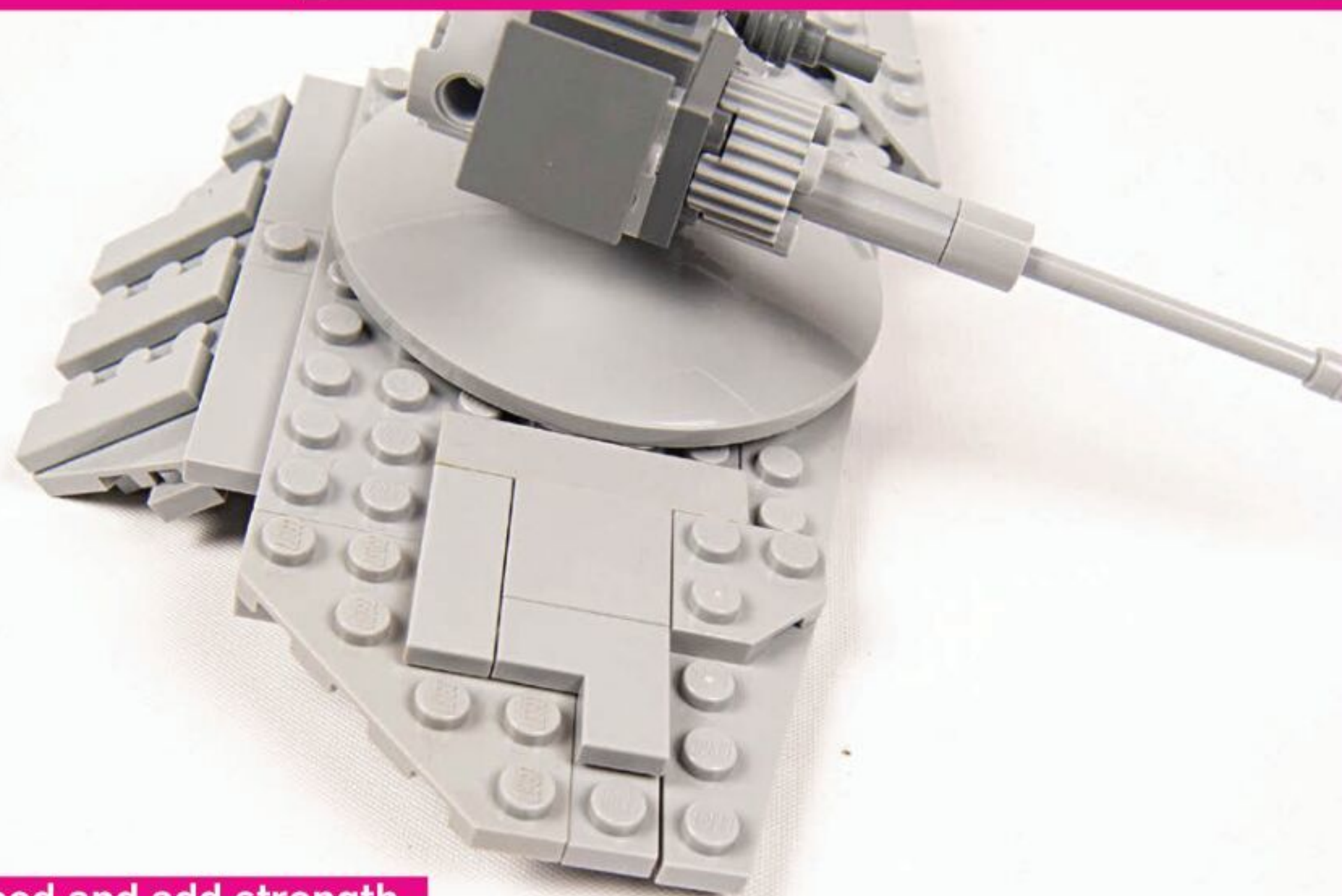
The head will be extended.

3



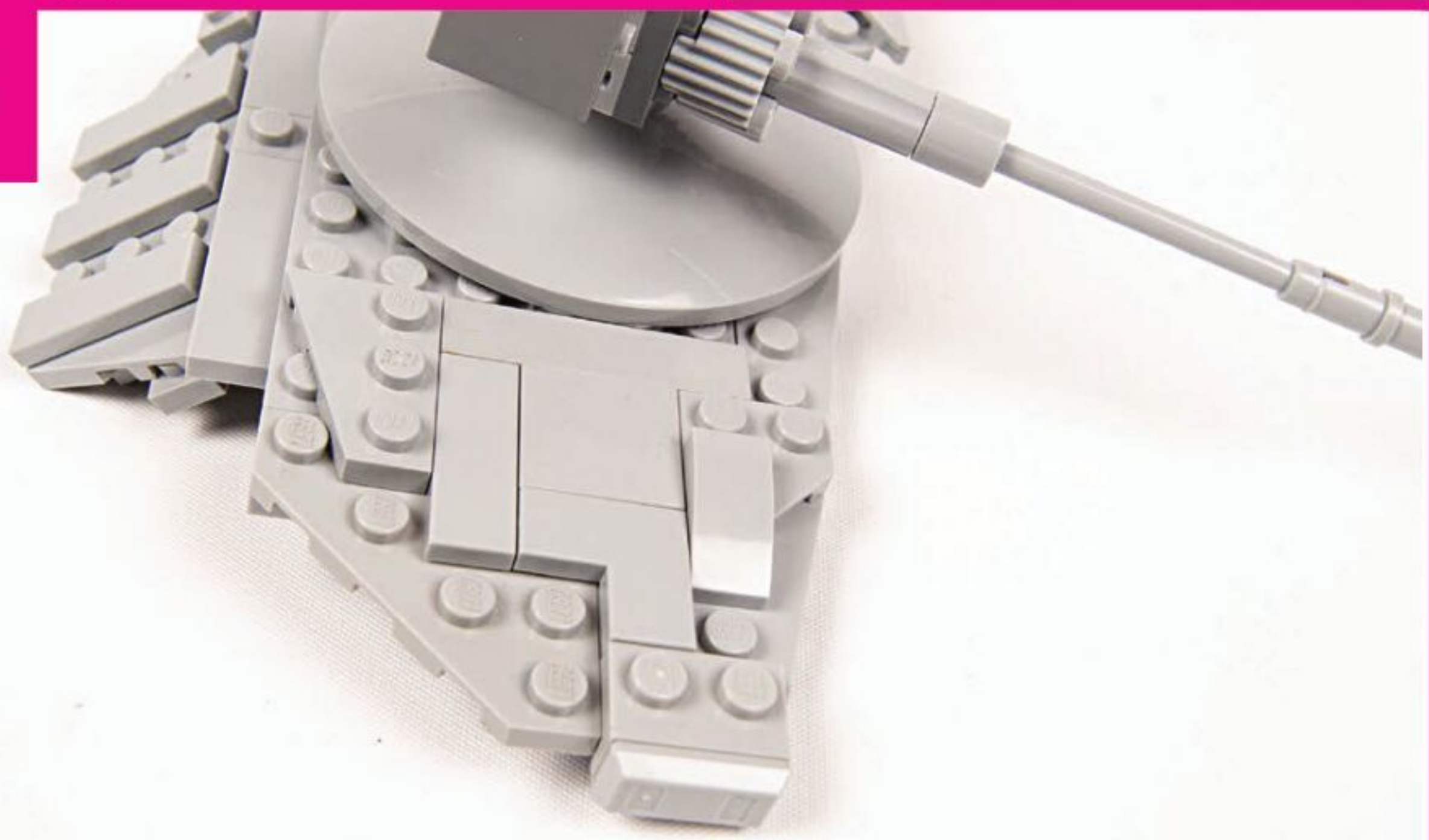
Add wedge plates and a 1x4 in the middle.

4



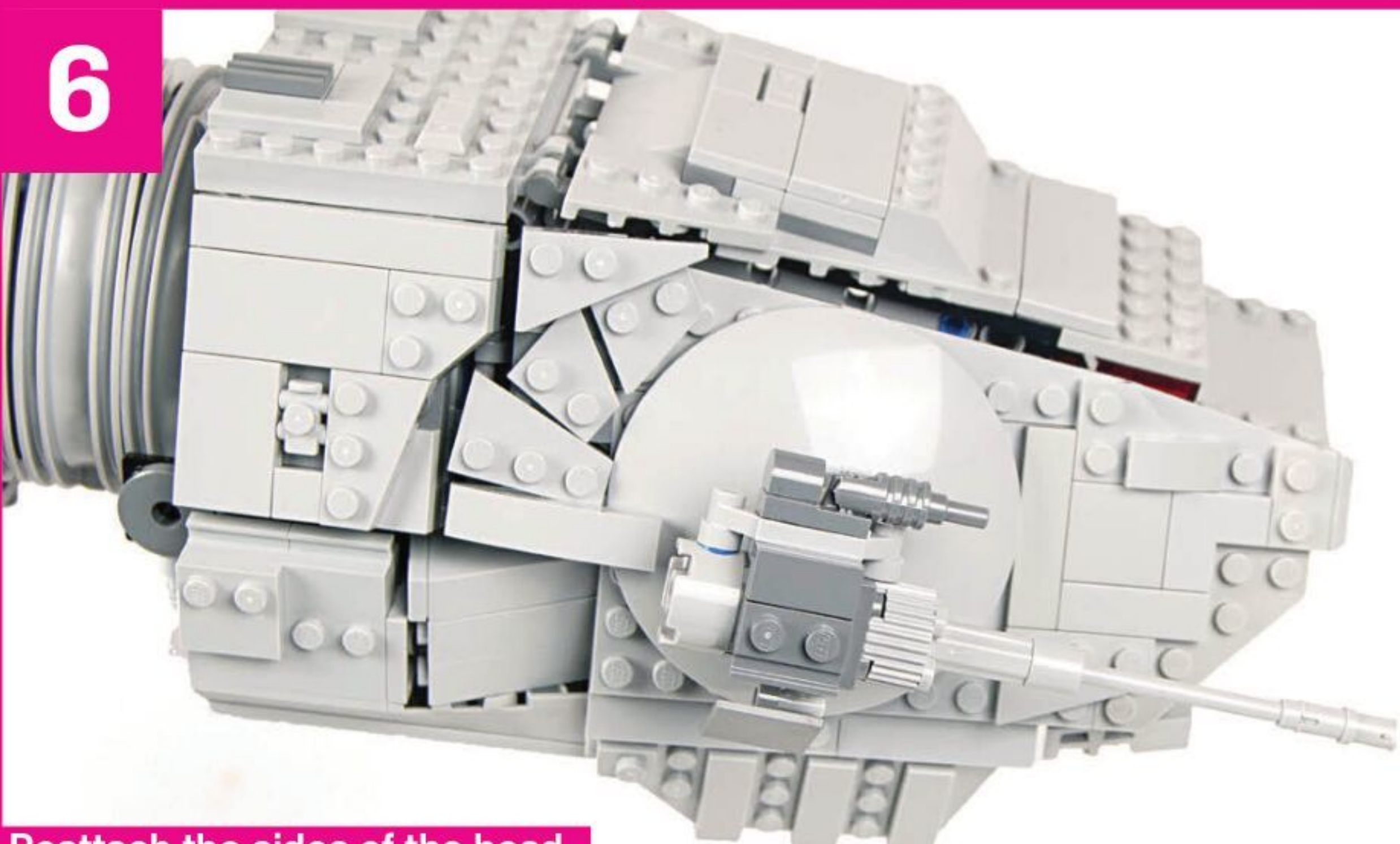
Tiles look good and add strength.

5



Protrude the front a little bit more as shown.

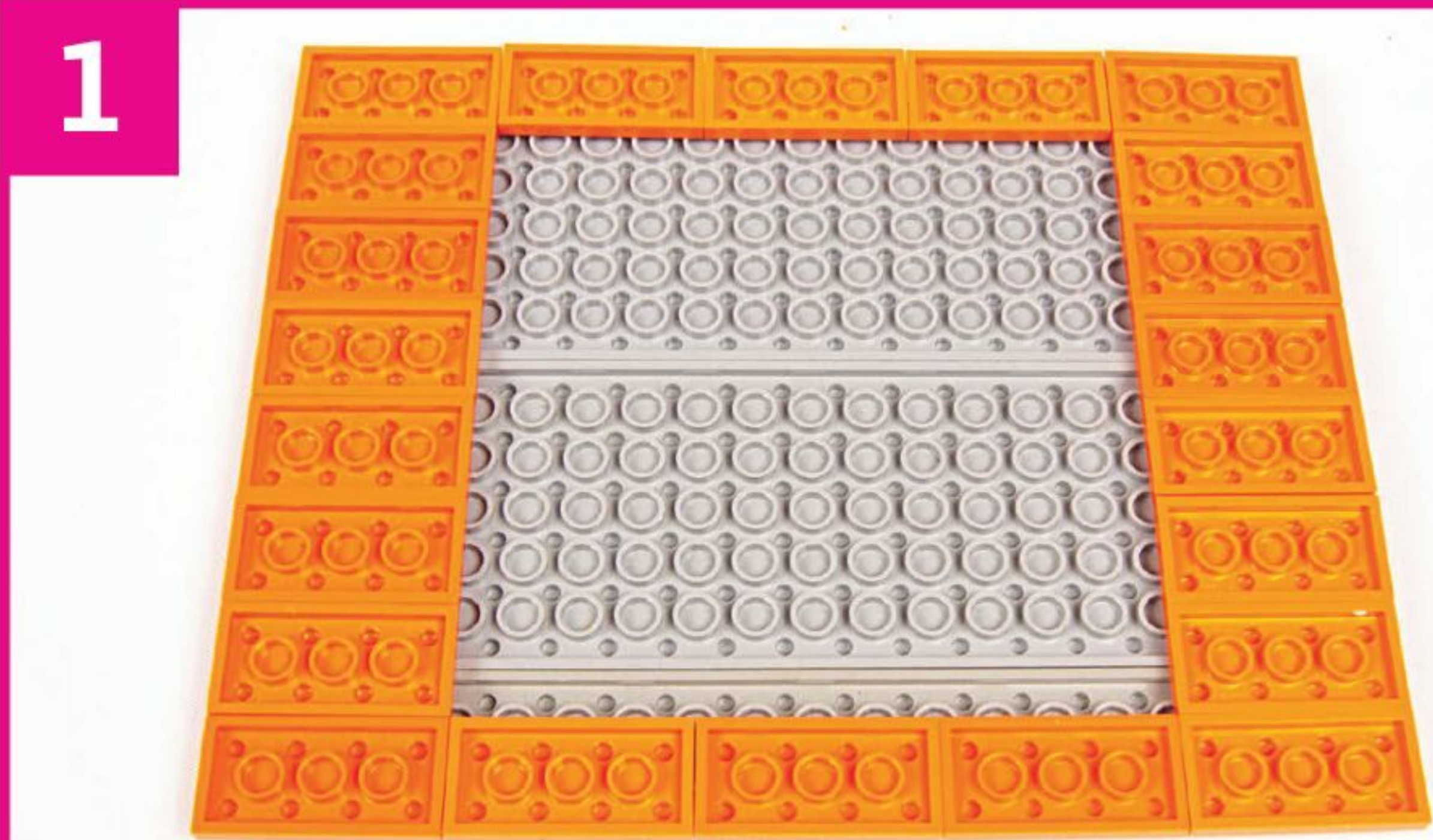
6



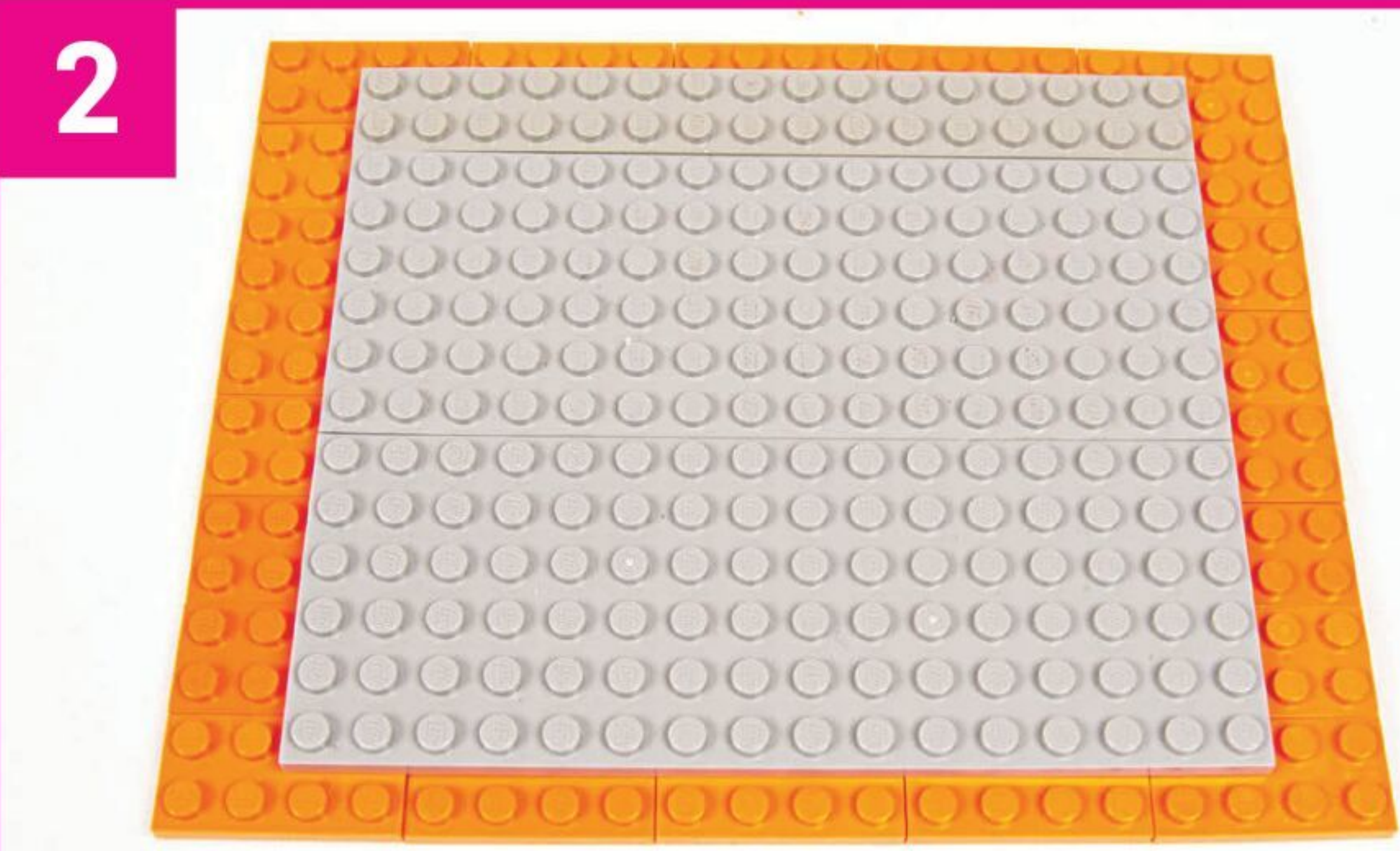
Reattach the sides of the head.

CARGO DOOR

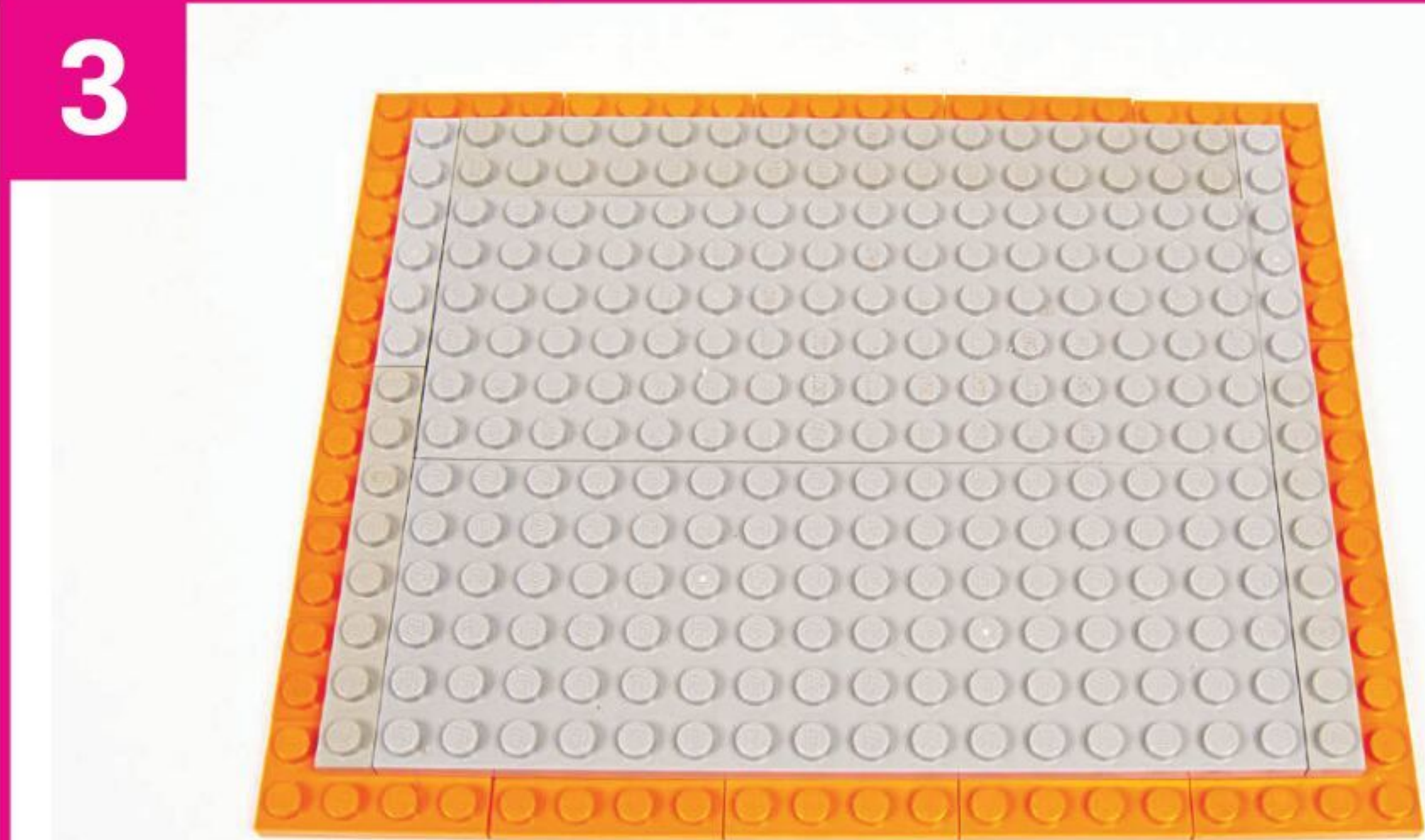
Visually, the most notable difference between the AT-AT proper and the AT-ACT variant is its large cargo door. Lucasfilm's movie makers opted to colour the door differently than the rest of the AT-AT body. This mod recreates that feature using orange plates and tiles. Large orange plates are somewhat expensive and hard to get, so the base is constructed of large, grey plates which are then outlined and covered in orange. The build is the same for each side, so construct two copies to get both doors. Once complete, they sit over the opening section of the main model and rise vertically for loading and unloading of cargo.



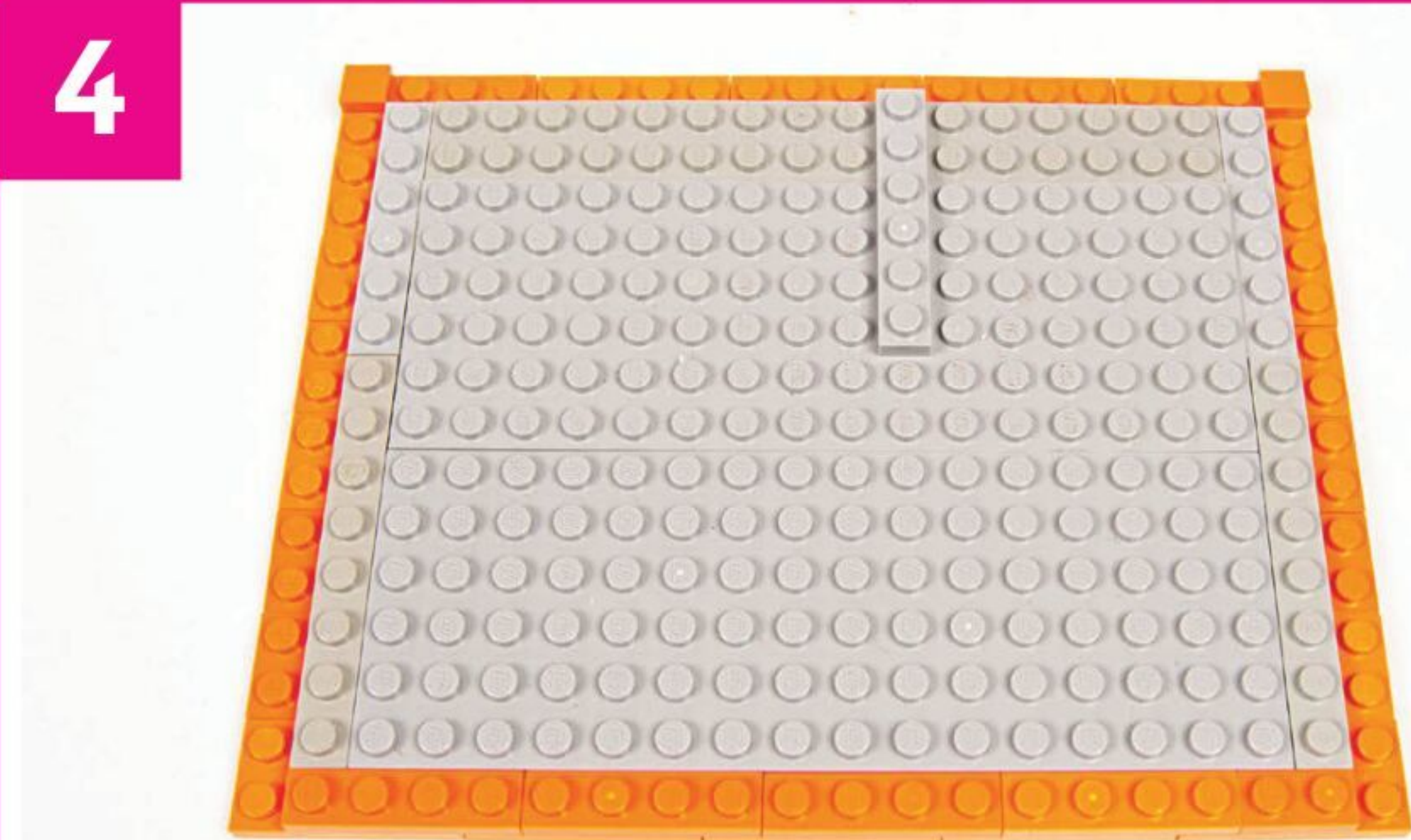
Here is the starting point.



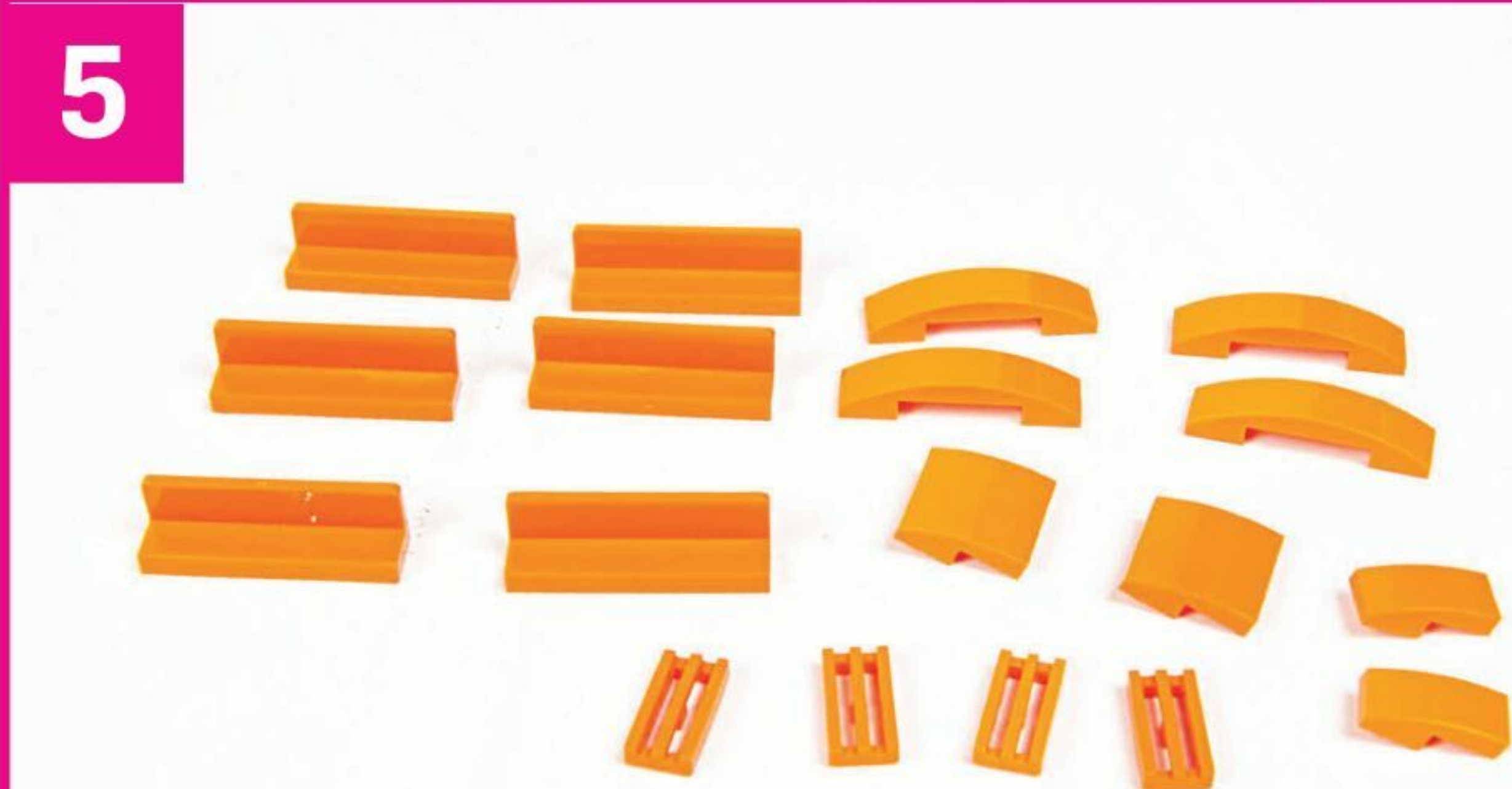
This uses two 6x16 plates and a 2x16 plate surrounded by orange 2x4 plates.



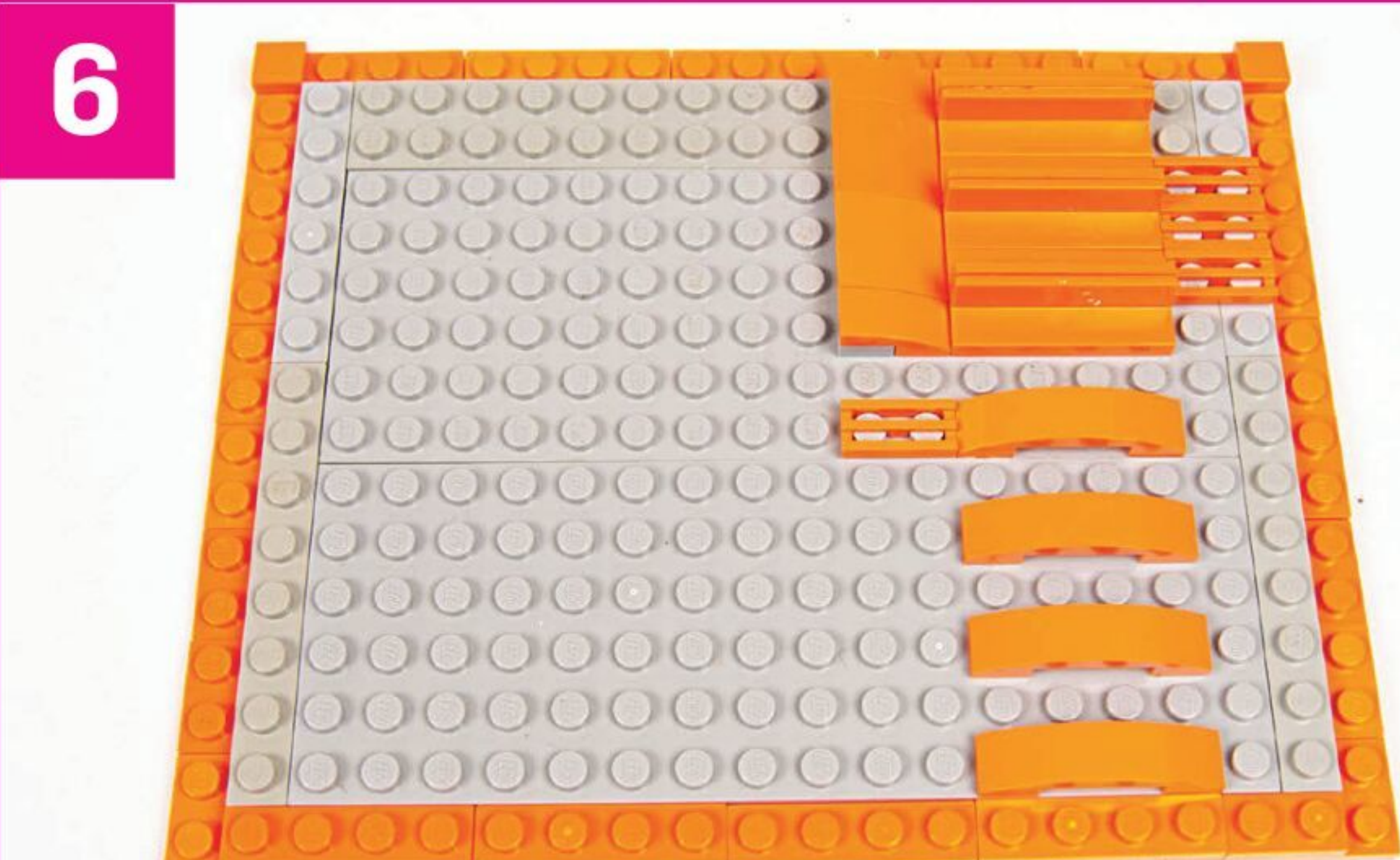
Add plates so that only a single row of orange studs is exposed.



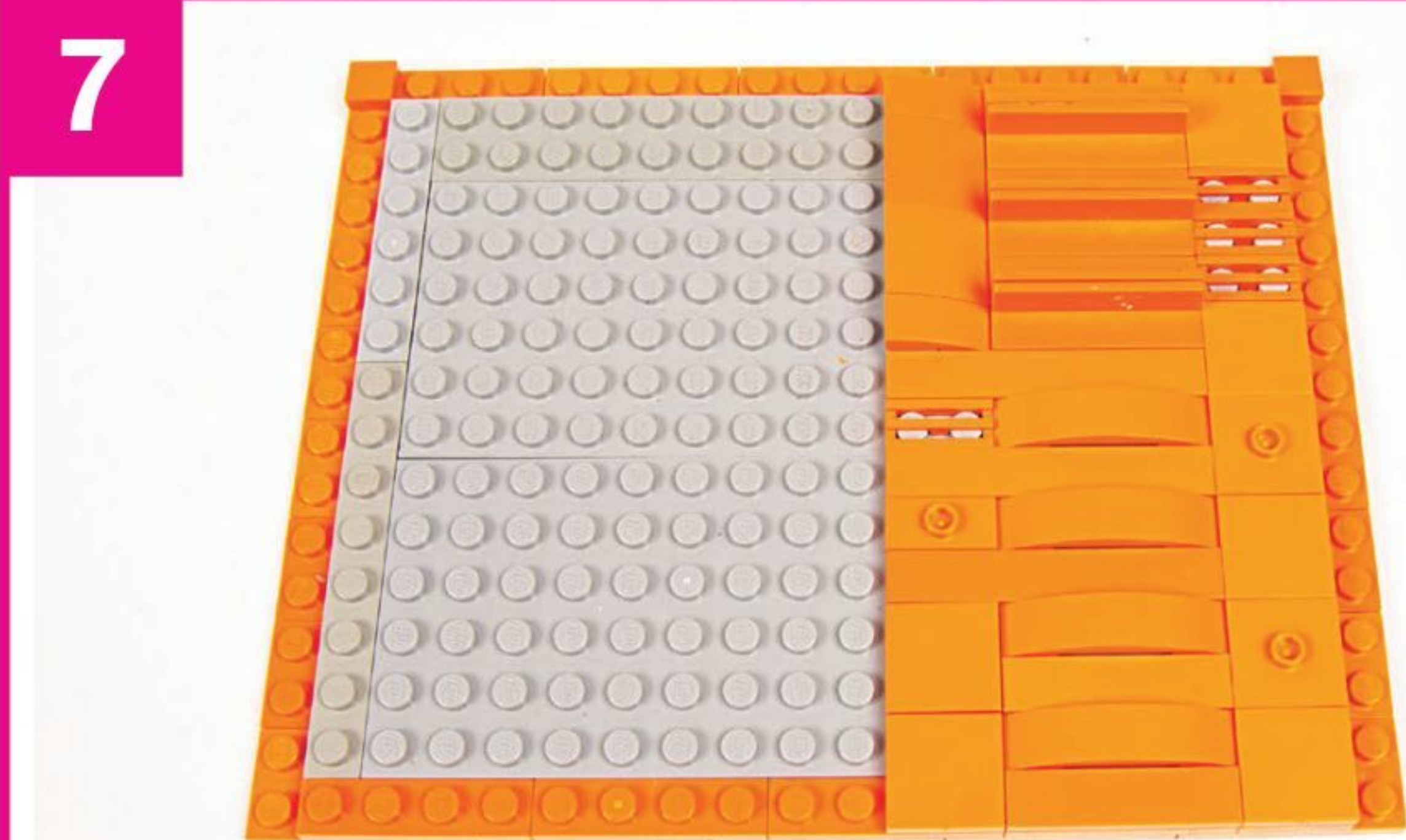
Add a 1x6 plate and two 1x1 orange tiles in the top corners.



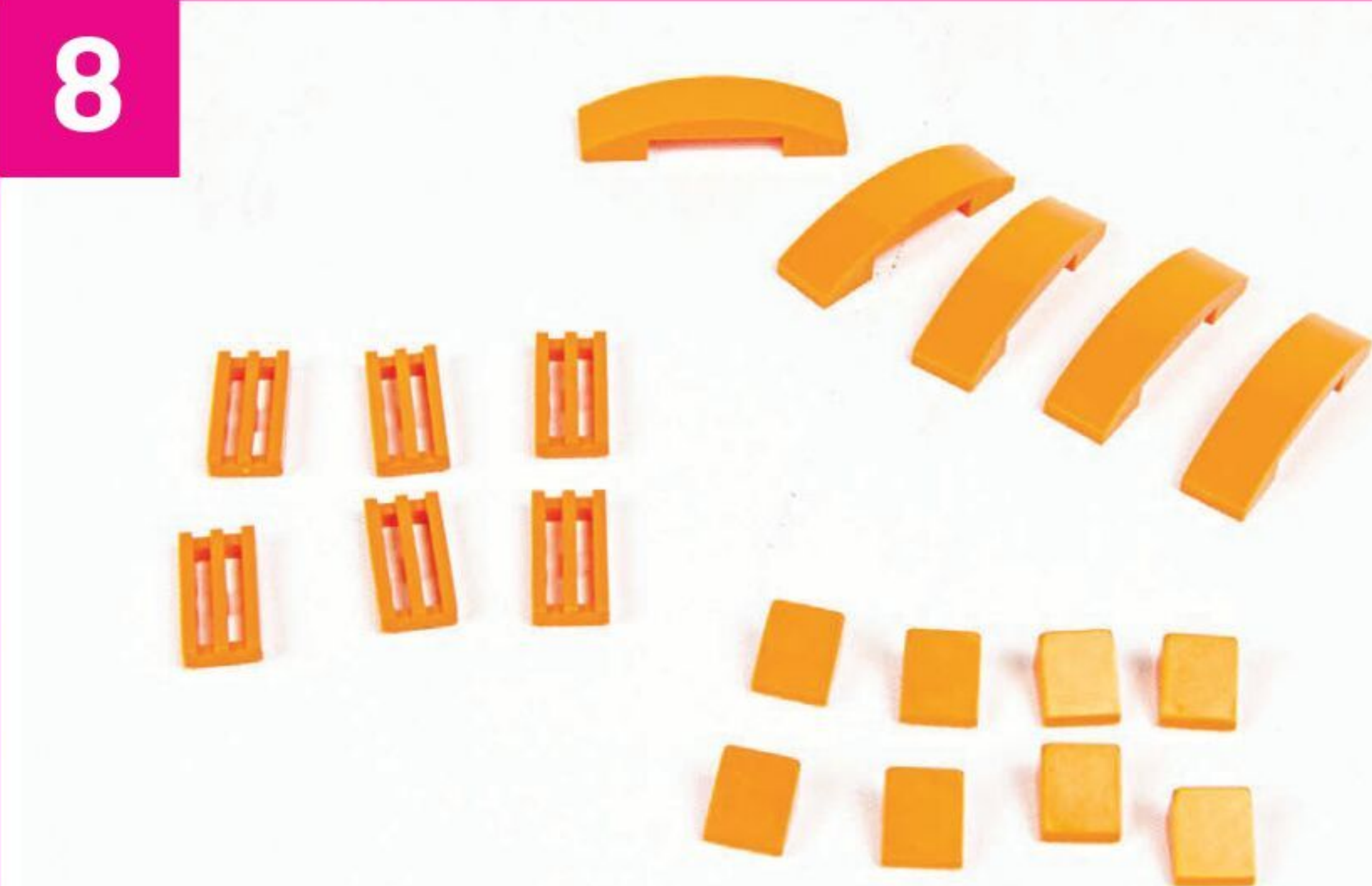
Collect these elements to start covering the cargo door's front.



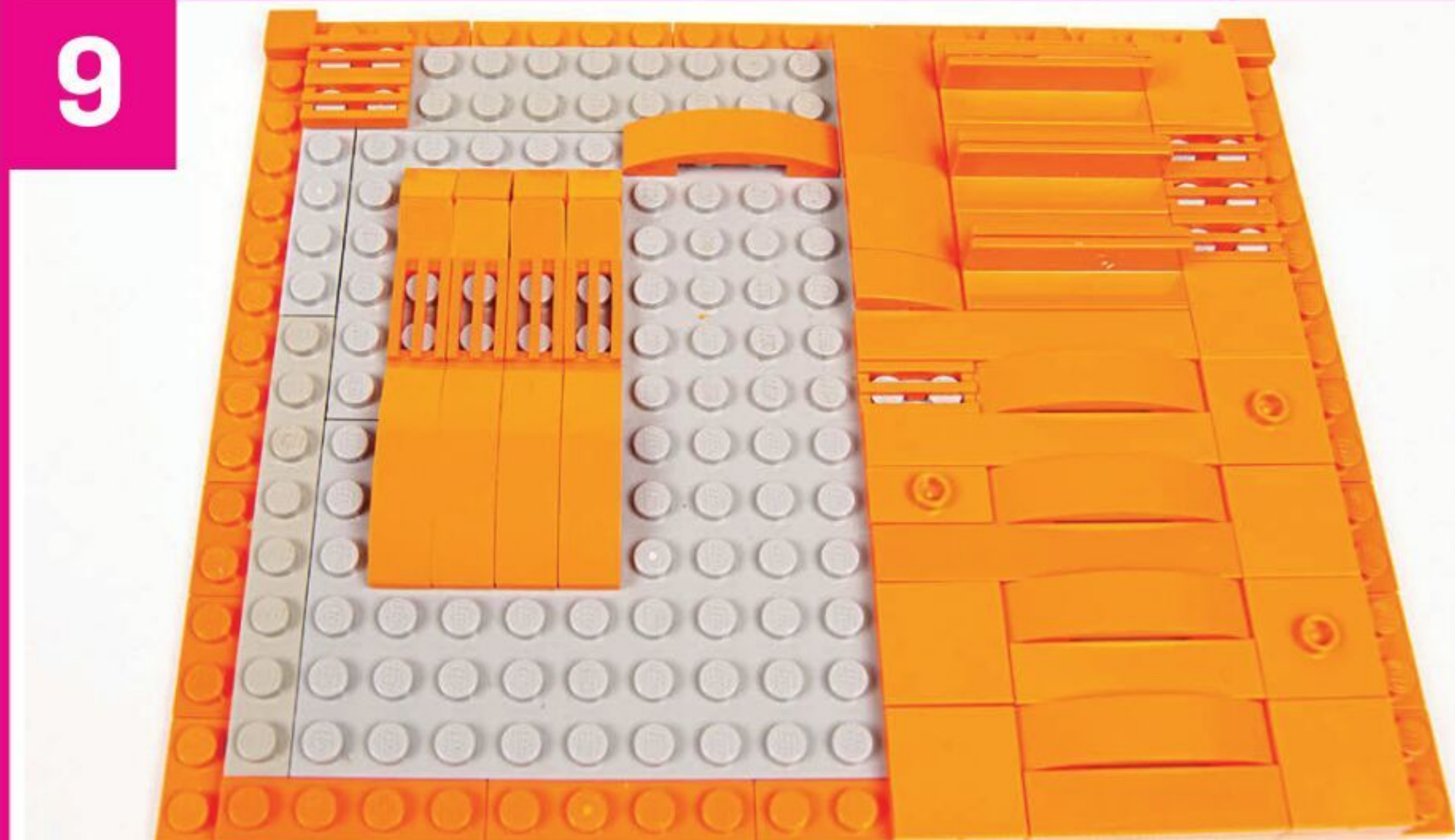
Attach as shown.



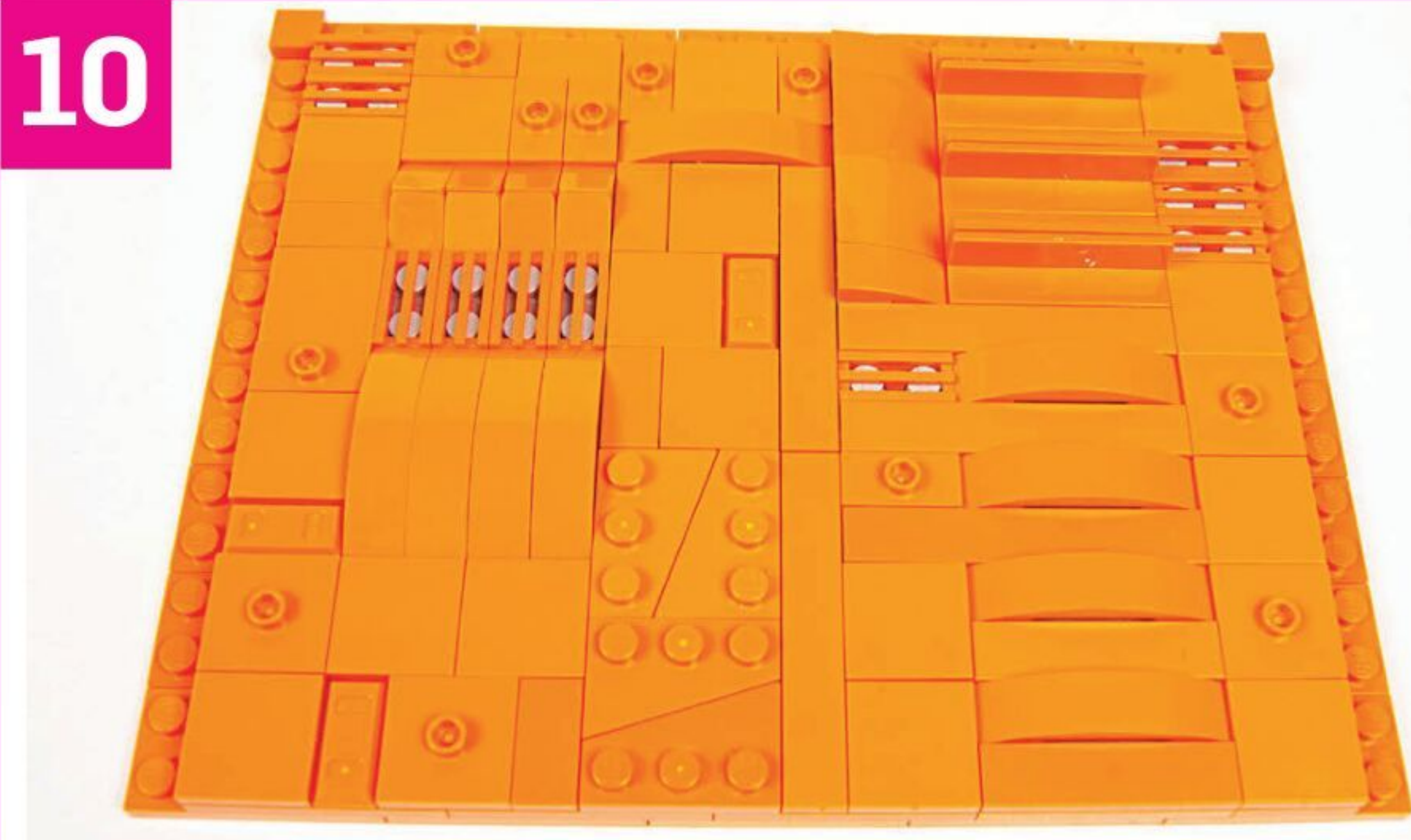
Add tiles and modified tiles to complete half of the door's face.



These pieces are needed next.



Attach as shown.



Fill in the remaining area with tiles, wedge plates and modified tiles.

11



Make two of these sub-assemblies.

12



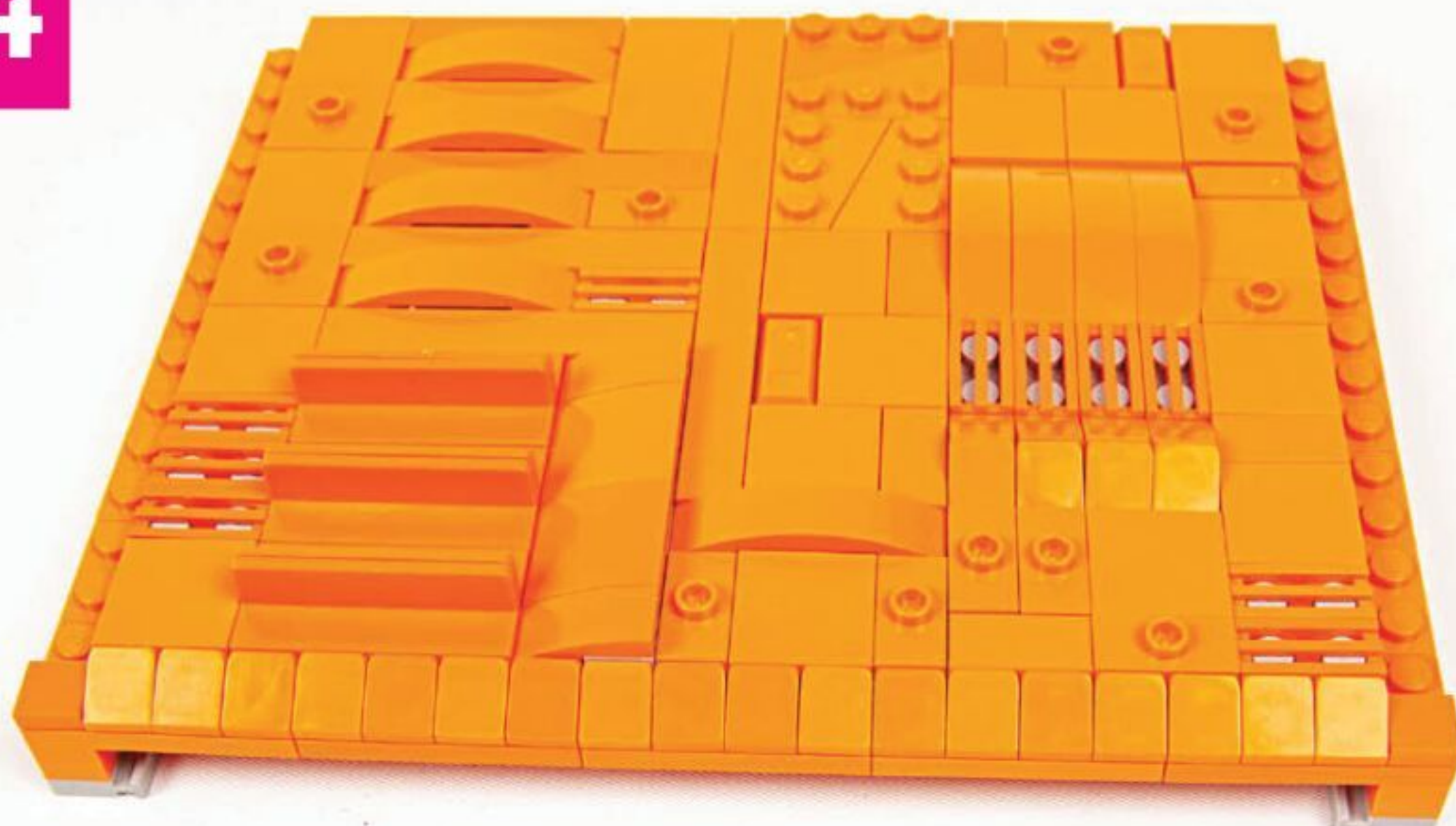
Add two layers of orange plates to join the slates together.

13



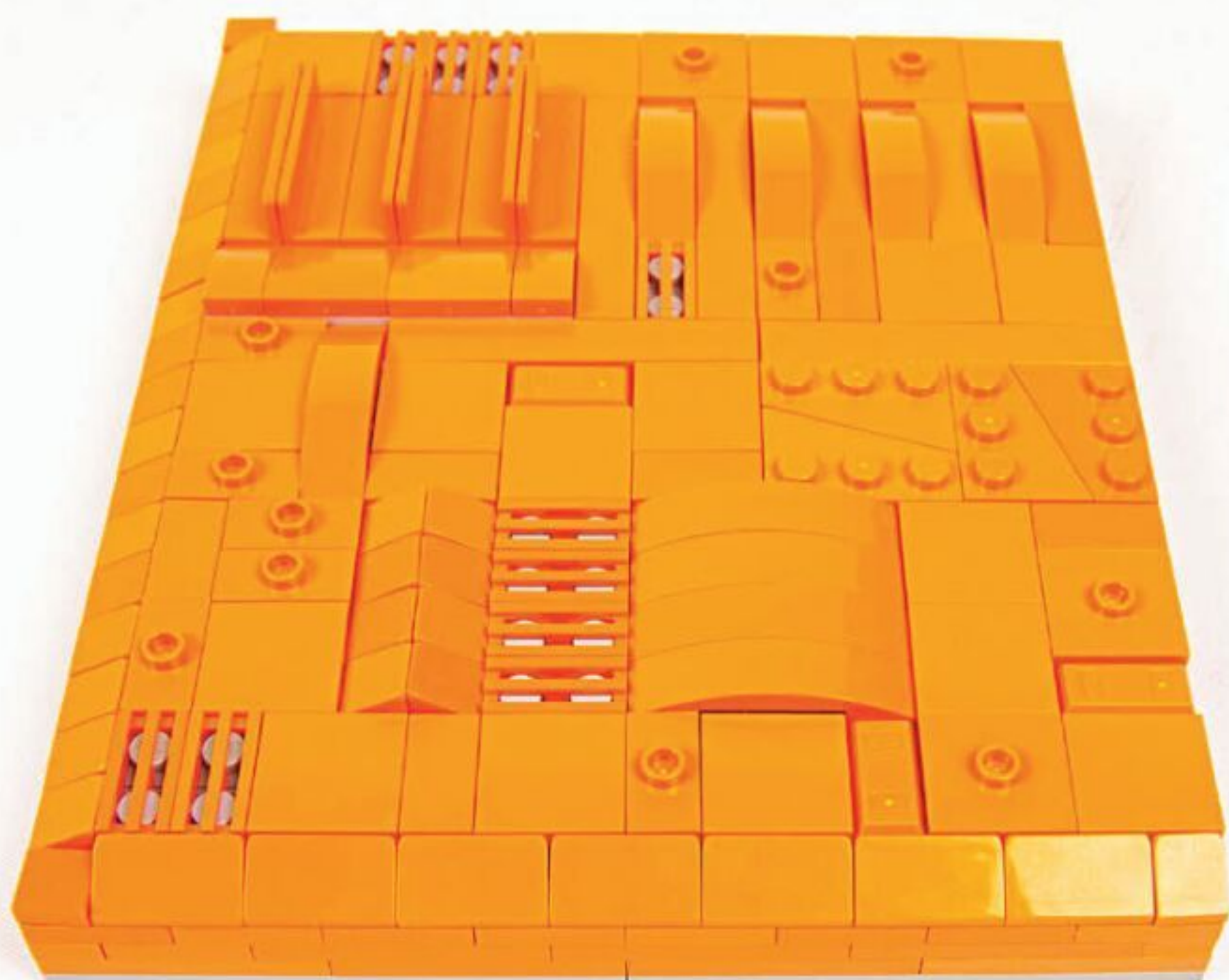
Add them to the back of the door on each edge.

14



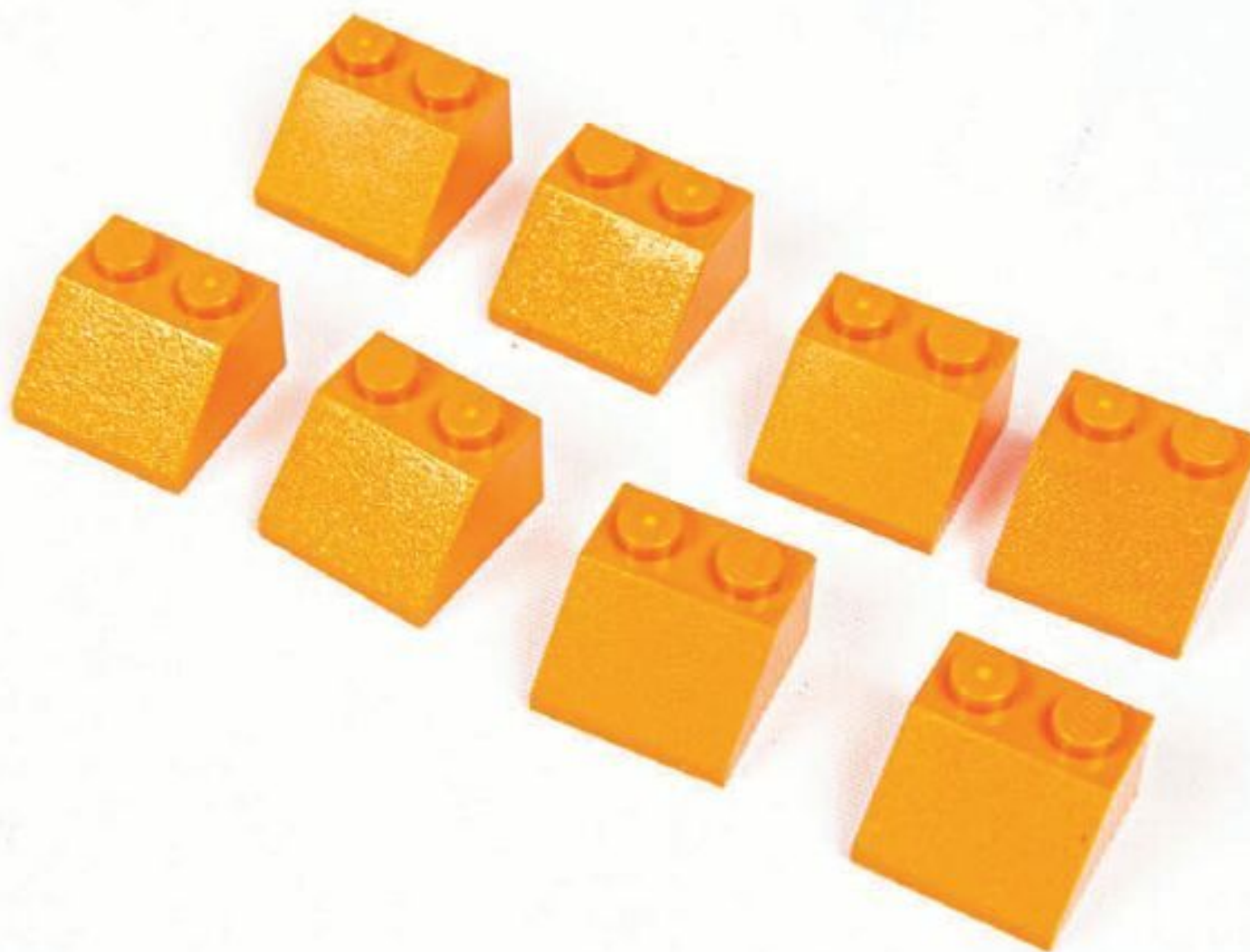
Add a row of cheese slopes between the two 1x1s.

15



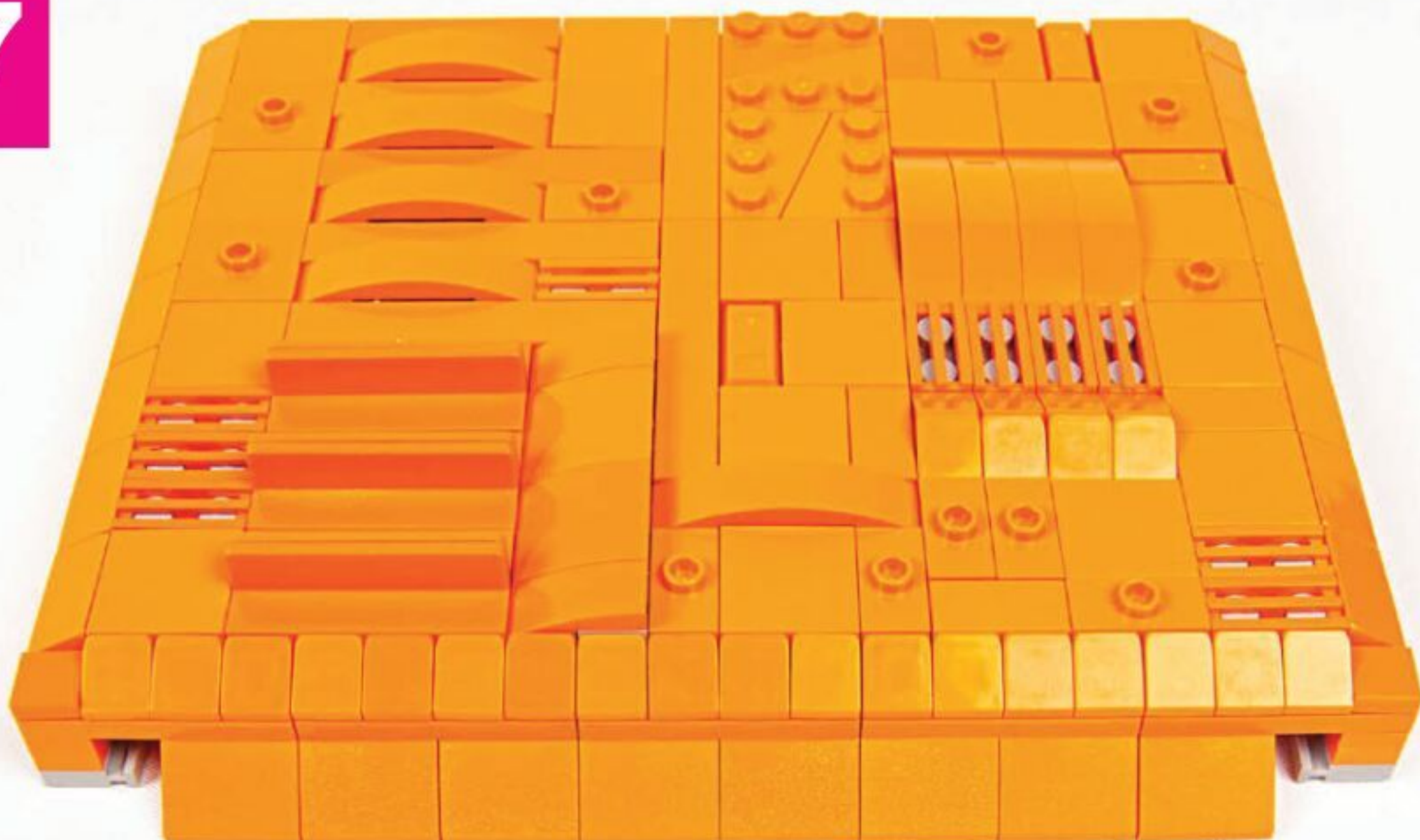
Add more cheese slopes along the edges on both sides.

16



Eight 2x2 sloped are needed.

17



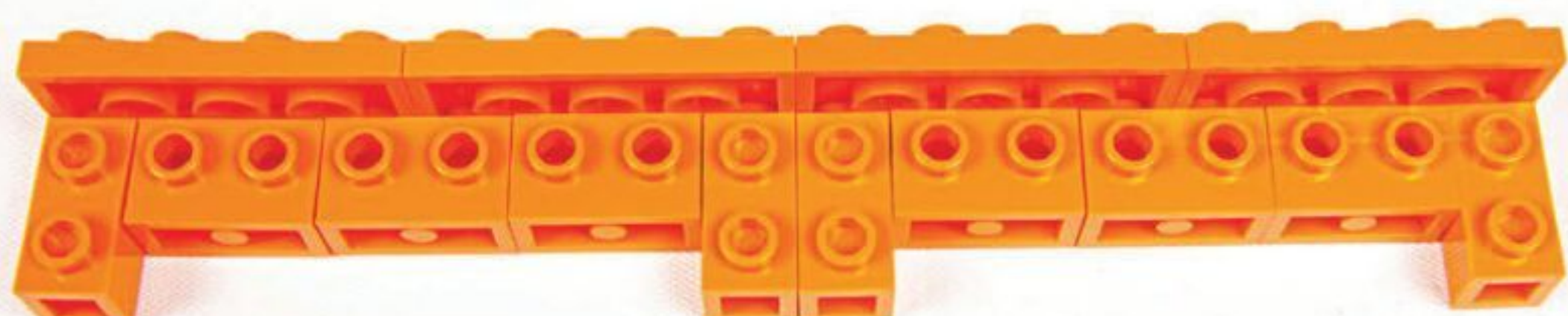
Add as shown.

18



One and two stud wide orange plates are used here.

19



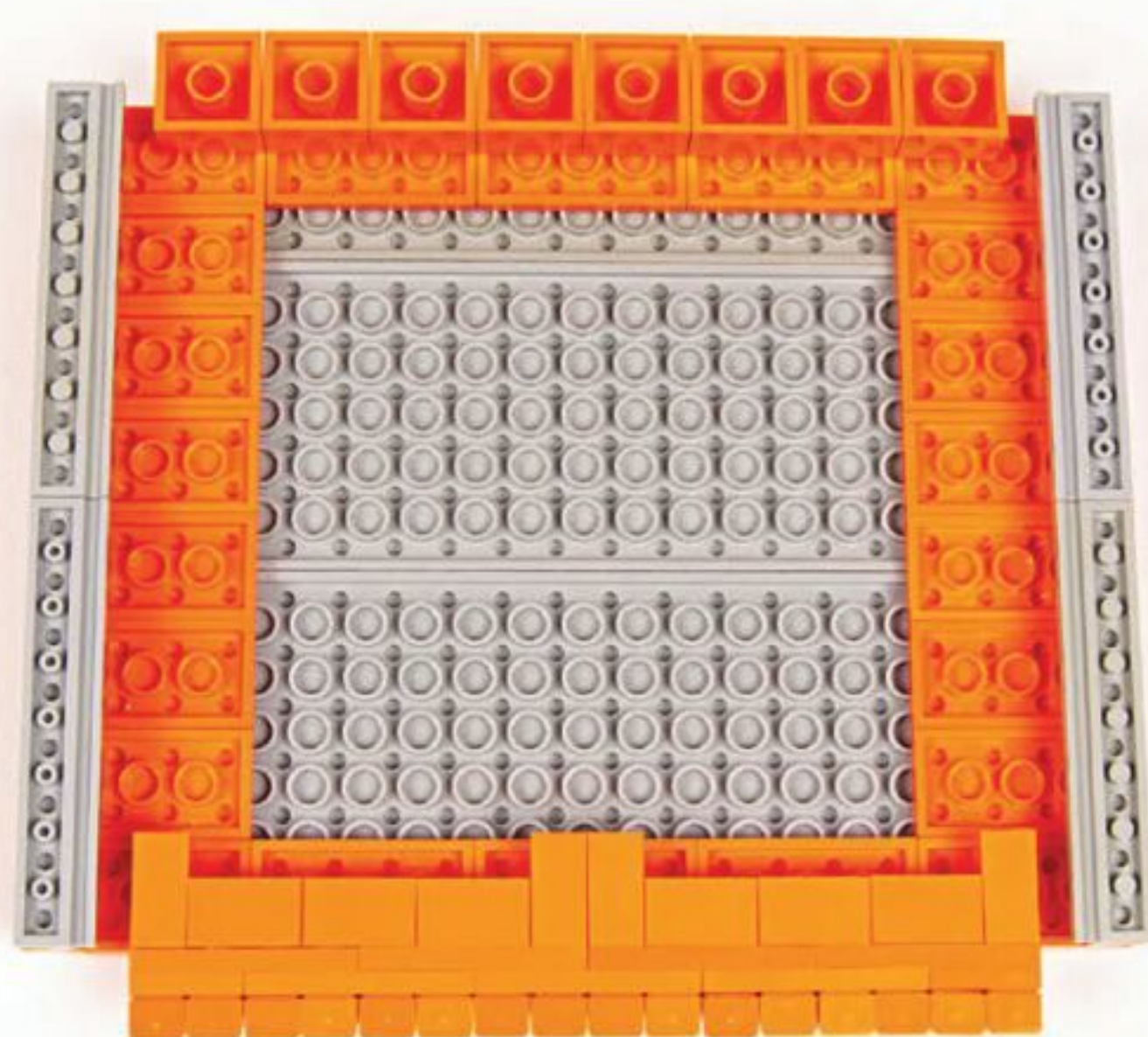
Add a row of modified bricks with side studs underneath.

20



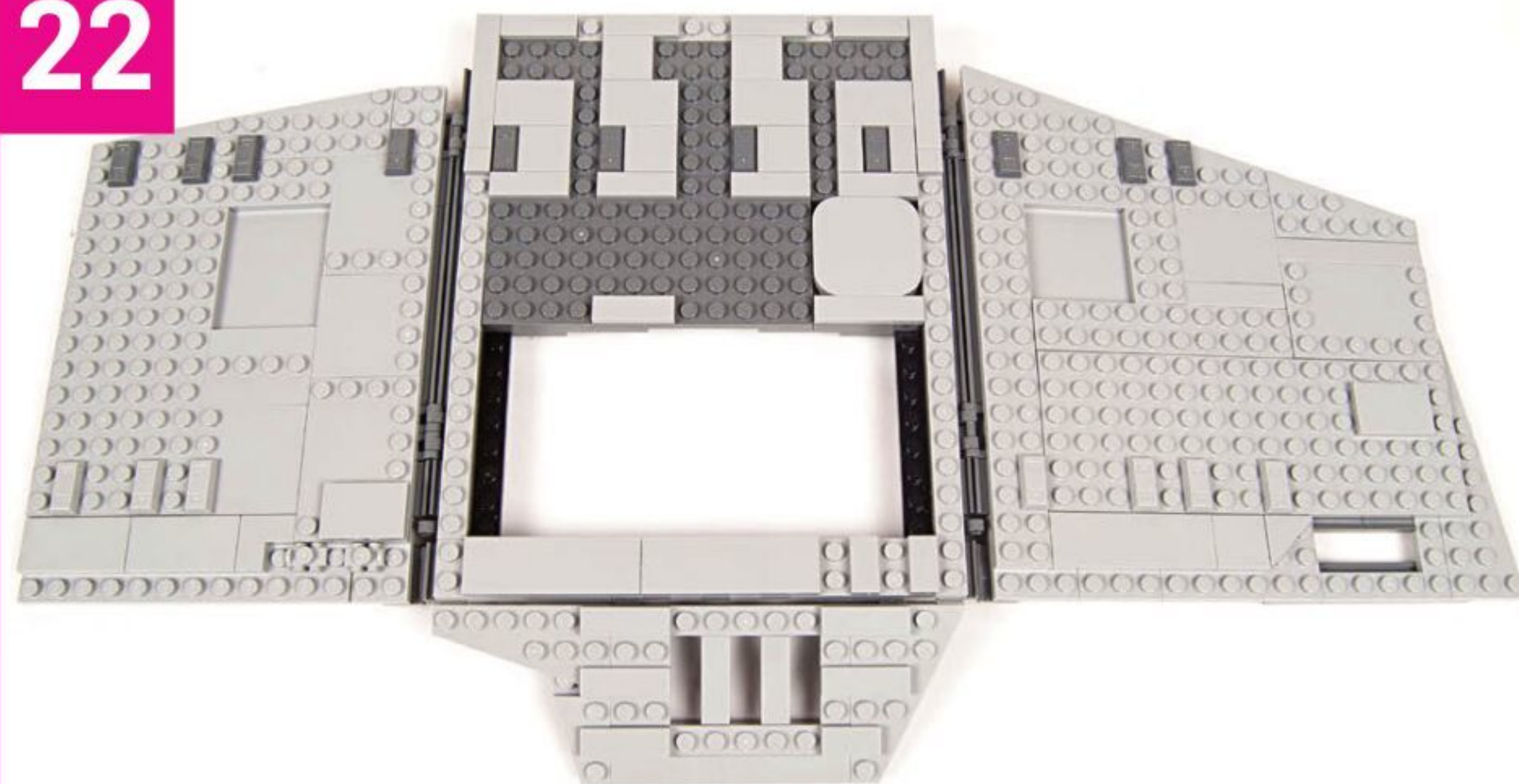
Attach two rows of cheese slopes on the top.

21



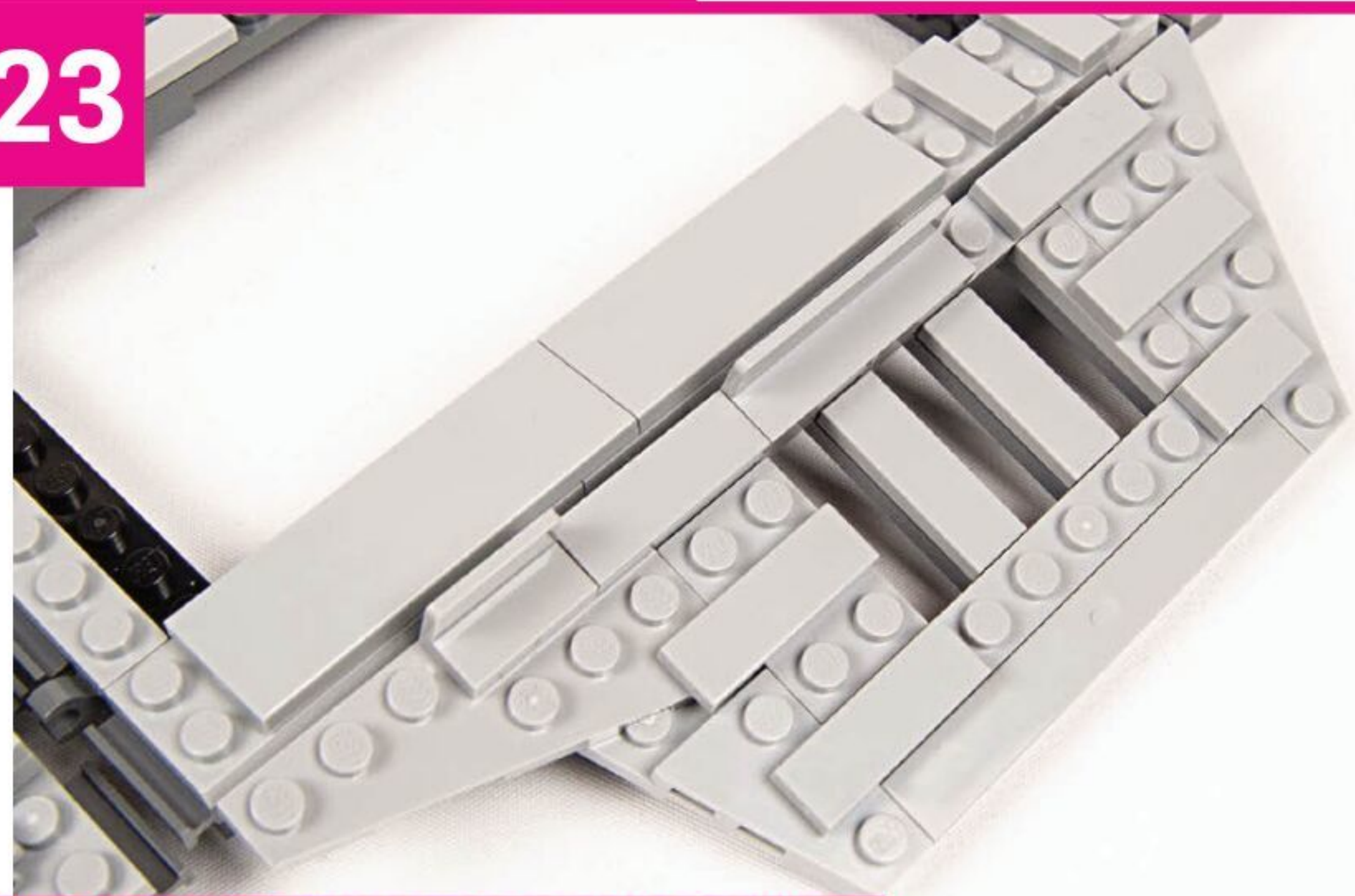
Attach to the underside of the door.

22



Strip the sides of the model so that they look like this.

23



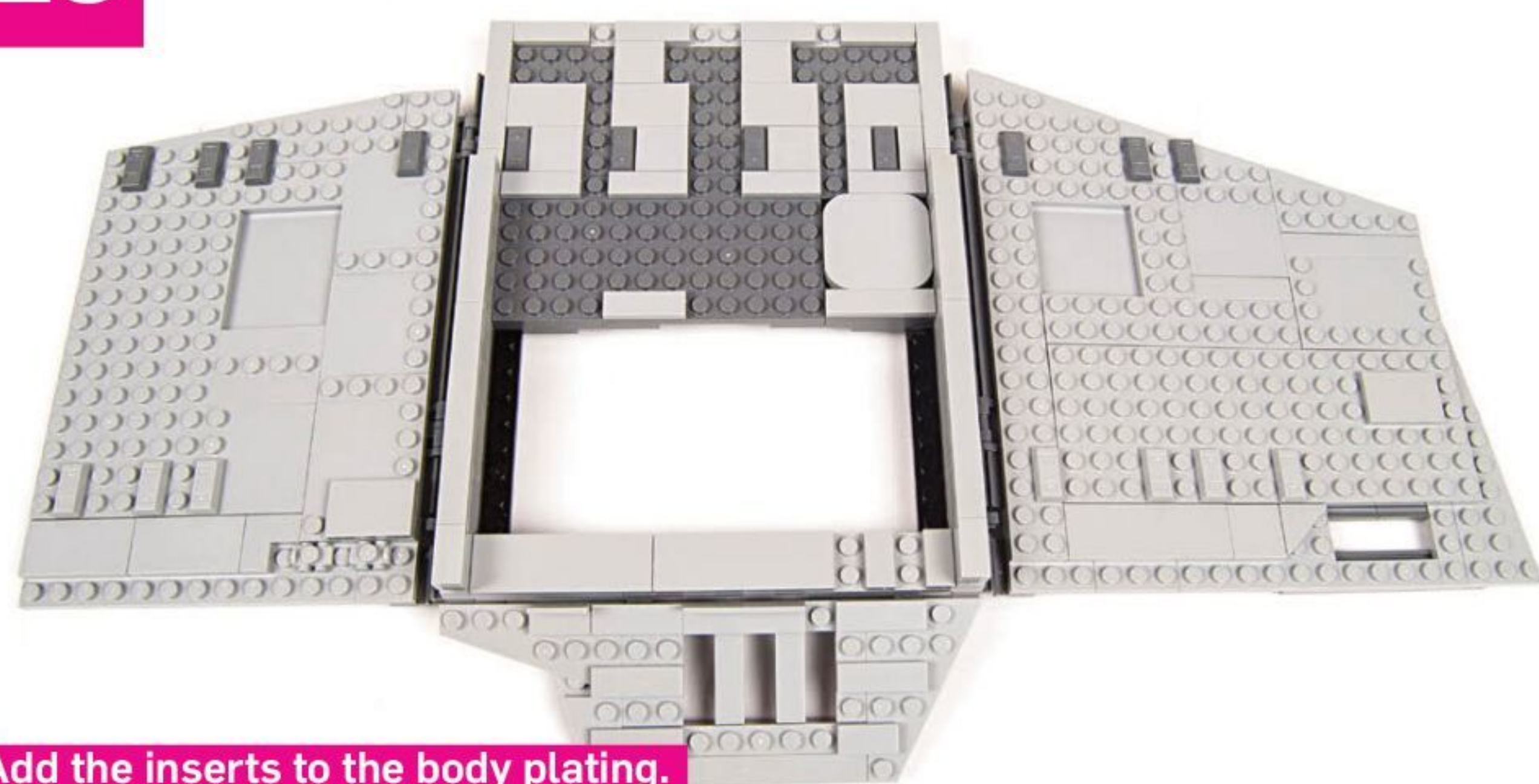
Attach two small panel pieces to the bottom.

24



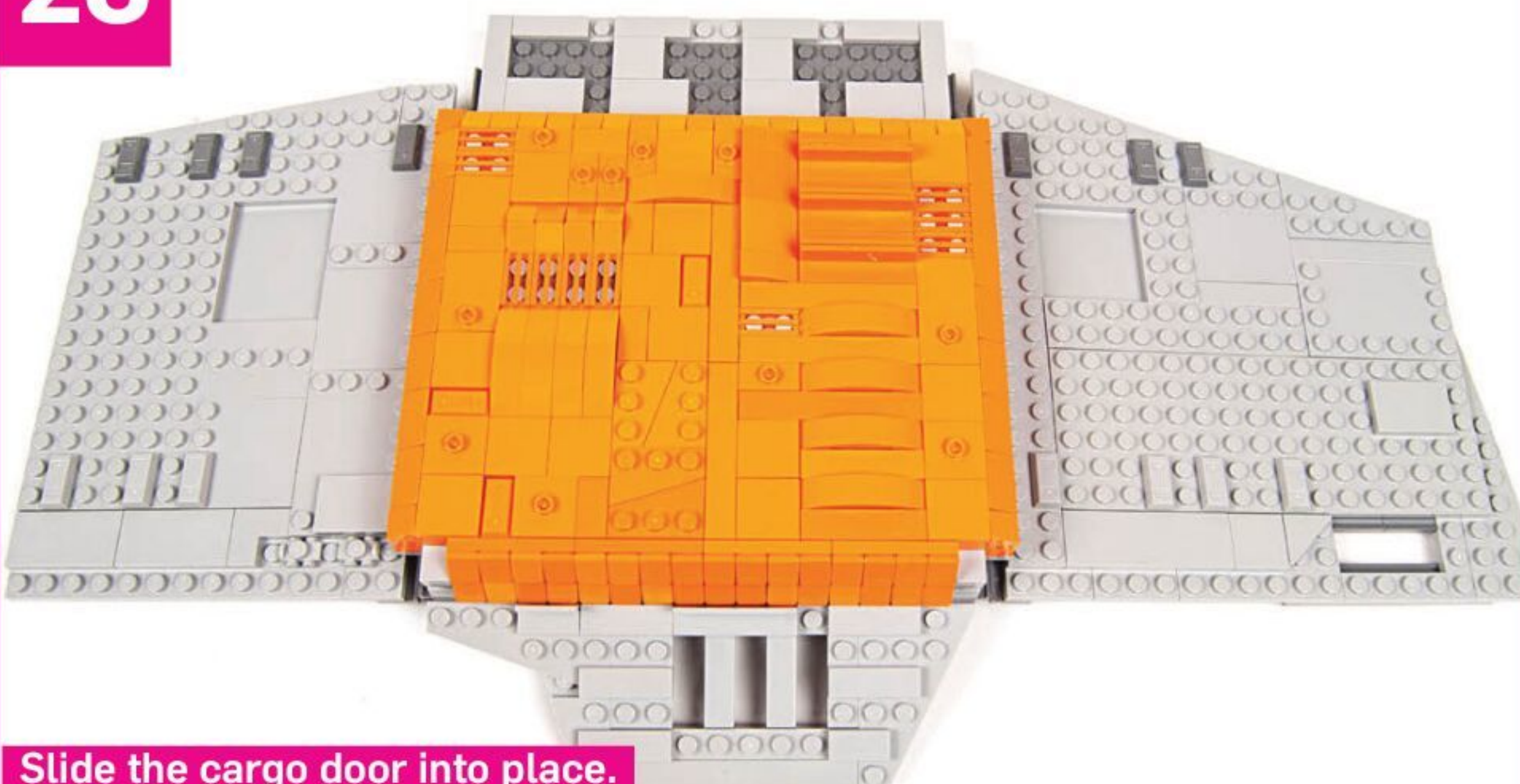
Construct two inserts per side as shown for the door's sliders to ride in.

25



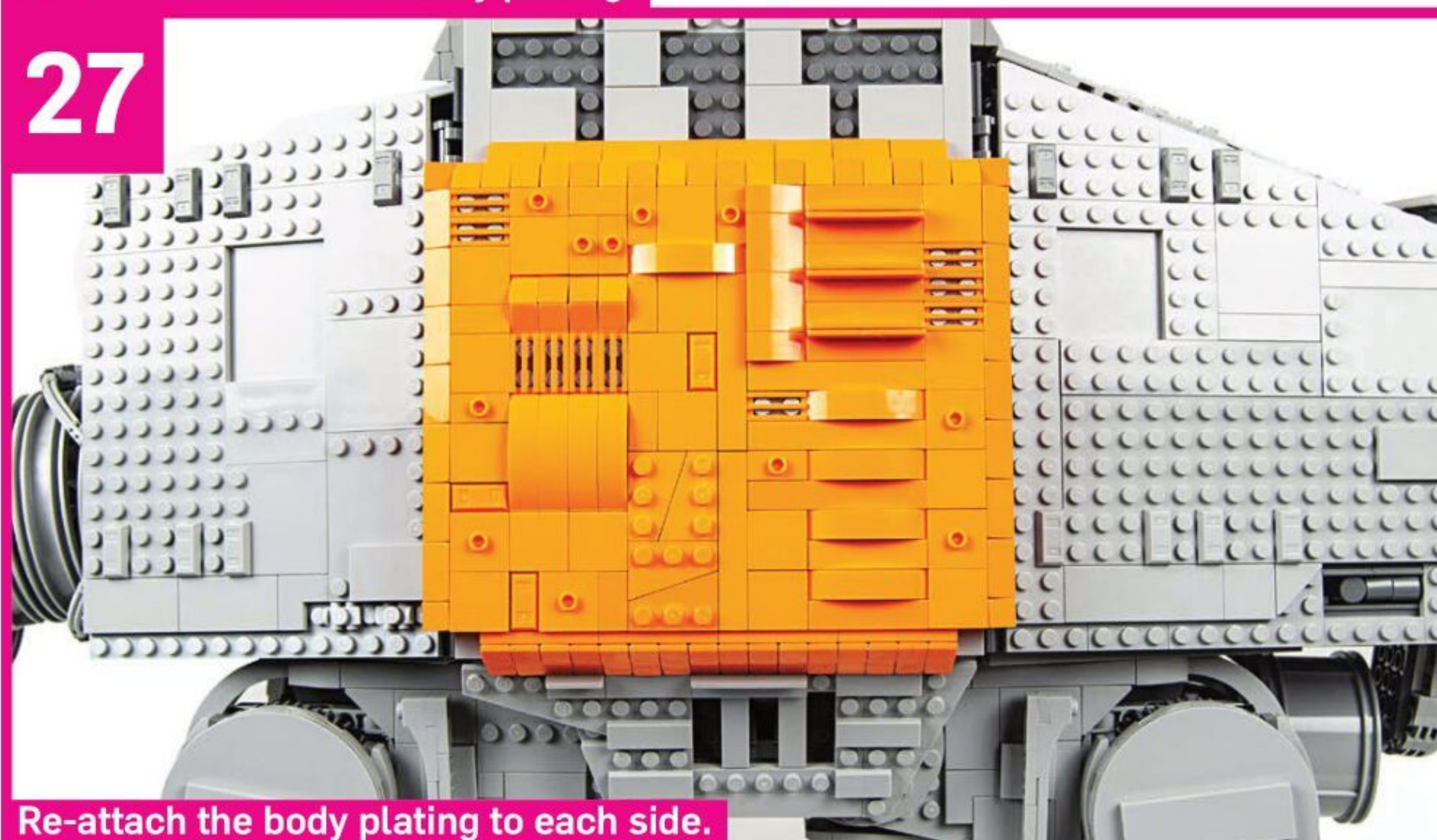
Add the inserts to the body plating.

26



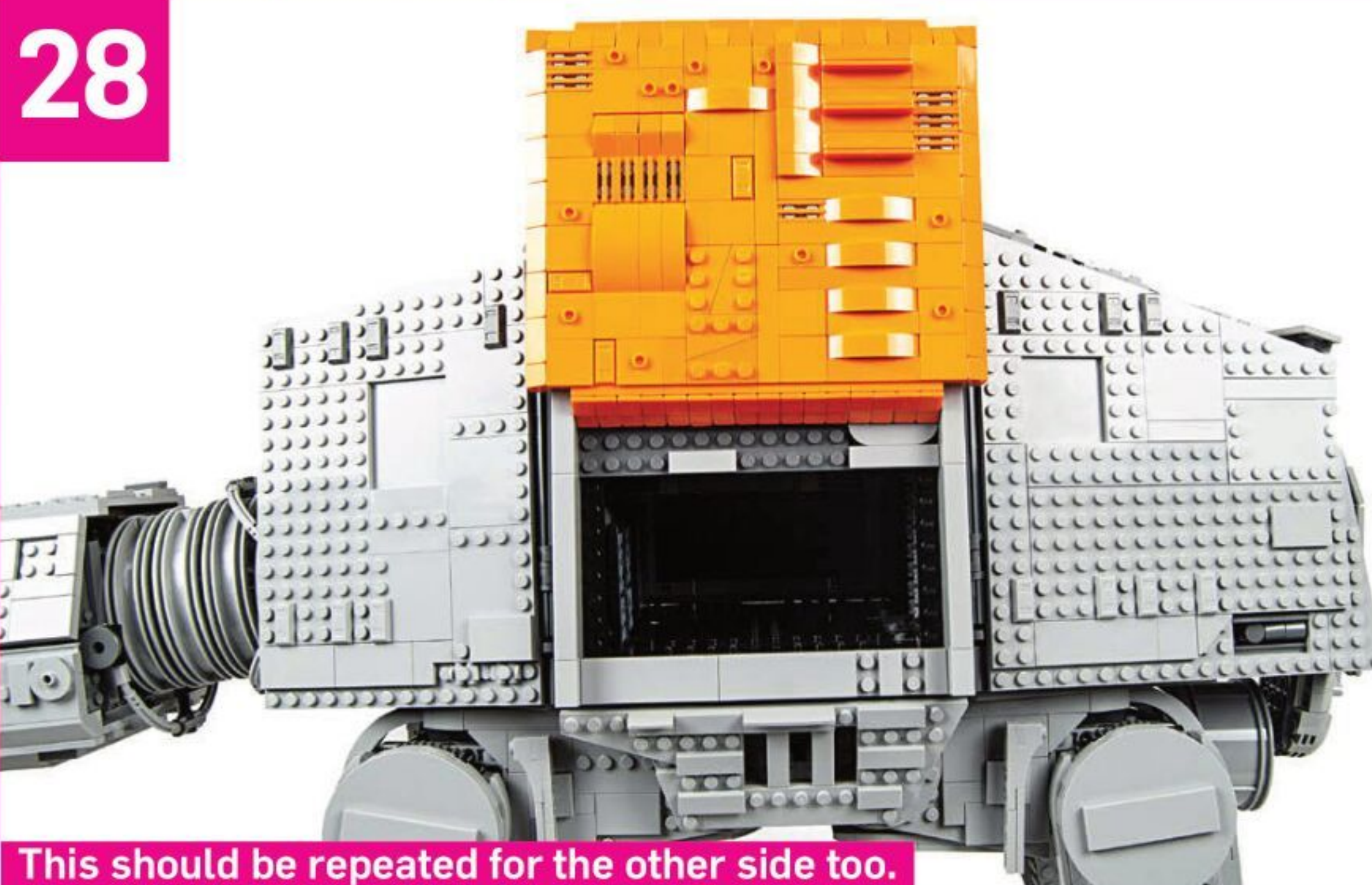
Slide the cargo door into place.

27



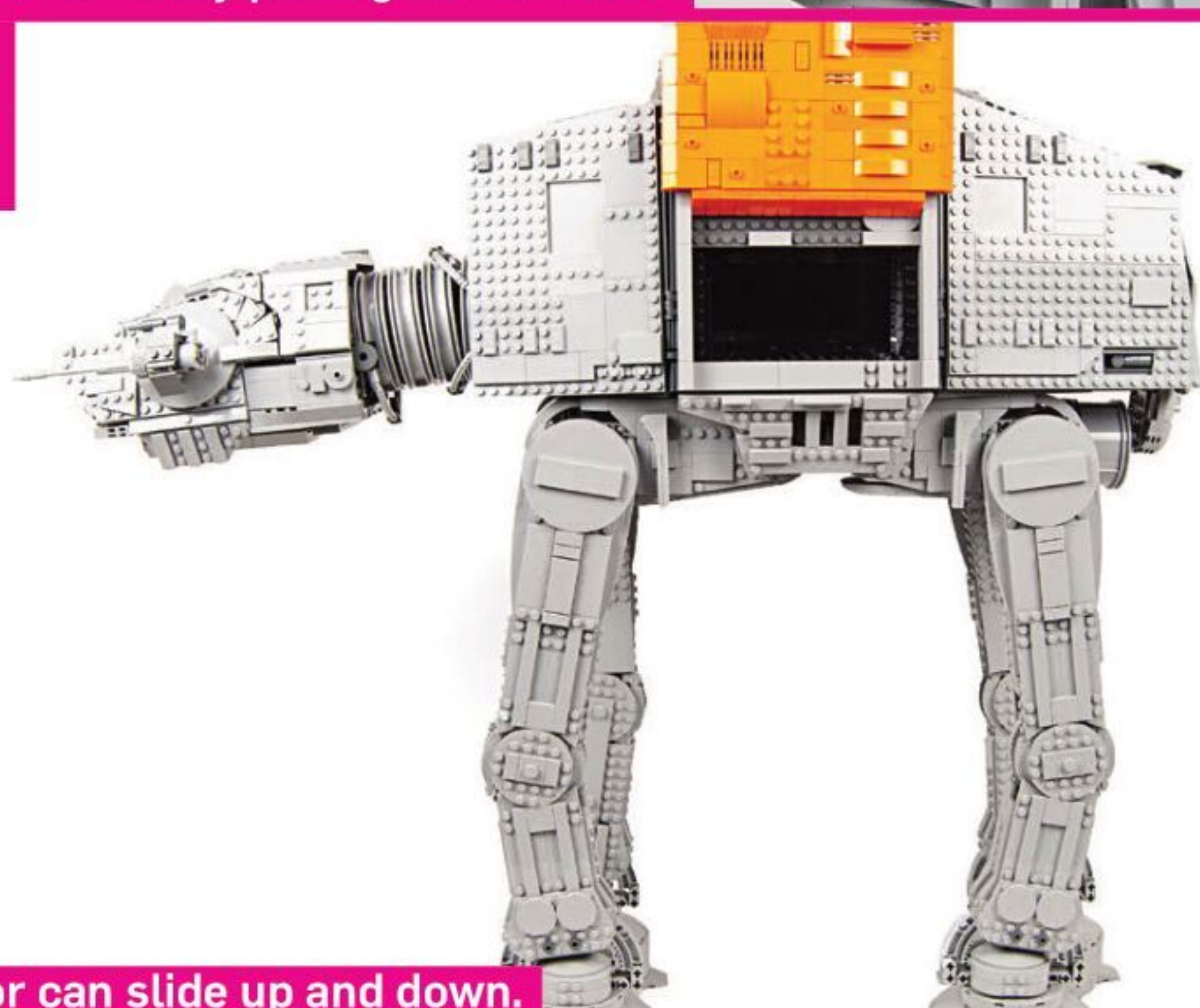
Re-attach the body plating to each side.

28



This should be repeated for the other side too.

29



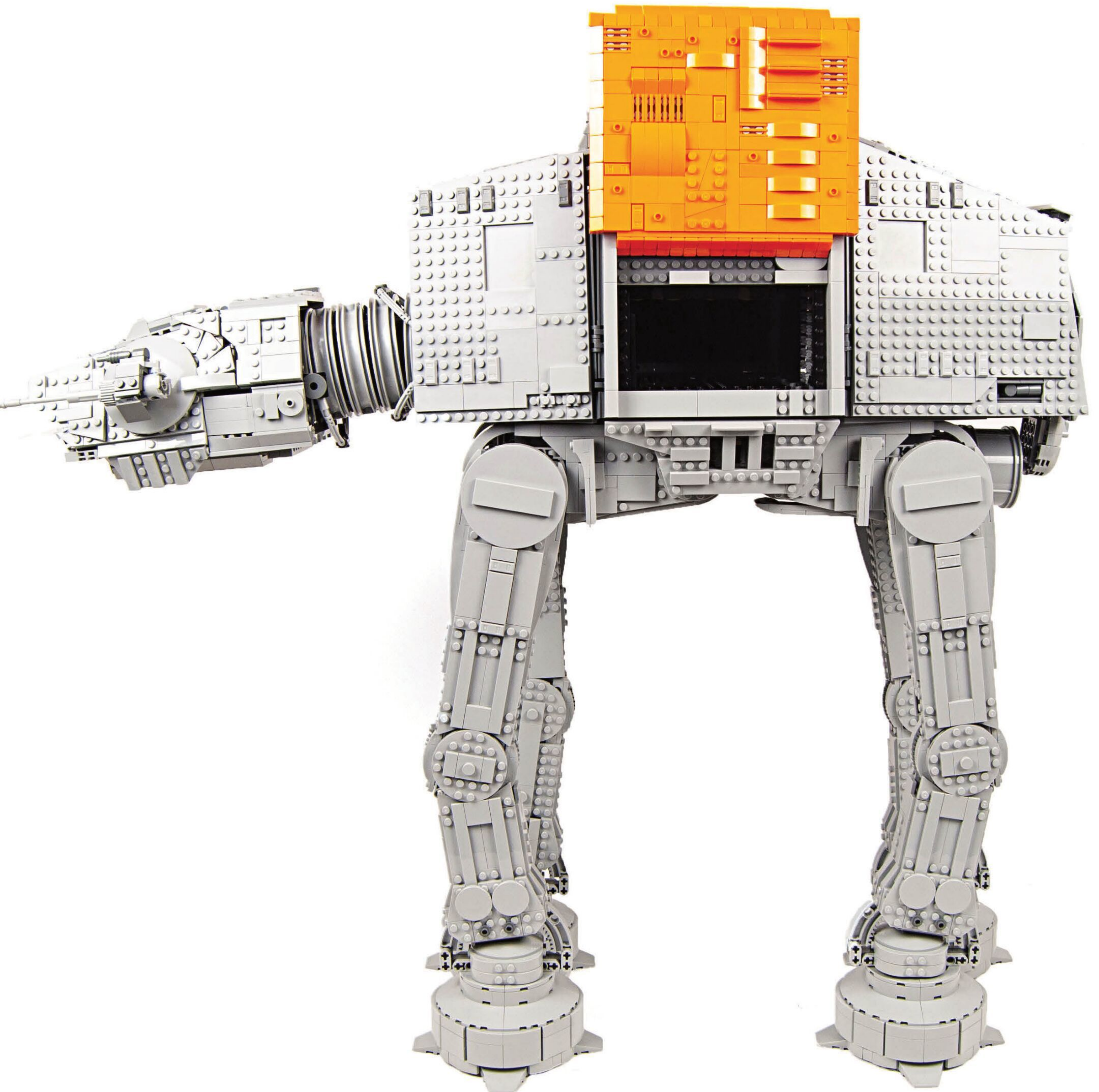
The door can slide up and down.

30



Here is the completed AT-ACT.

■ ■ IT FEATURES A MODIFIED BODY WITH CARGO DOOR AND DEDICATED BED FOR TRANSPORTING MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT ■ ■



KEY



CASTLE
HELMET



MINIFIGURE
LEGS



MINIFIGURE
ARM



MINIFIGURE
HAND



MINIFIGURE
HEAD



MONKS HOOD



PEASANT
HOOD



QUIVER



TORSO
ASSEMBLY



VIKING
HELMET

TAILOR MADE

Suit up your minifigures for the right occasion with these tips for mixing, matching and adapting LEGO characters

Words and Pics: Simon Pickard



THERE ARE MANY occasions when fans give in to the customising of parts and minifigures. However, for the resourceful builder there are plenty of minifigure components perfect for creating the right character for your model or

scene. Putting together the perfect minifigure can be expensive but it is often comparable with the cost of ordering customised printed parts.

One fundamental principle that should be considered through this feature is that of skin

tones. Many legs and torsos are designed to match hand or head tones. Such prints usually need to be matched up, although on occasion the type and location of such printing can allow you to break this principle.



THE FUNDAMENTALS

The primary construction of a minifigure consist of four elements; legs, torso assembly, head and headgear. Much of your minifigure needs can be catered for by only following these simple parameters.

The medieval men at arms look distinctly different while all wearing the same chainmail torso assembly. The men wearing green tunics on the other hand share a common set of legs.

A simple Hobbit hair piece was all it took to convey the character Ripley in the Aliens Loadlifter. The dungaree torso assembly and the blue hips of the leg piece help to convey the blue harnesses of the mech suit too.

Shared themes and colours across printed pieces help blend a design together. The Kylo Ren helmet piece blends with an Ice Planet torso print

to create a futuristic environmental mining suit.

You can also upgrade existing figures like the Collectible Minifigures Roman shown here. The recent shoulder pad piece gives a much valued boost to the appearance of the armour. Kenobi's Jedi robes make an appearance for the Roman engineer too.

KEY CONCEPTS

You should familiarise yourself with all LEGO themes, because those you might now know well still have transferable prints. NINJAGO, Super Heroes and Harry Potter were all sources utilised in the creation of the medieval minifigures shown.

SHARED THEMES AND COLOURS ACROSS PRINTED PIECES HELP BLEND THE DESIGN TOGETHER

Different legs alter the appearance despite the identical torsos.



The same legs with different torsos.

Shoulder pads enhance the Roman.

Hobbit hair is used to portray Ripley.

Matching prints from different themes works a treat.



LEGS, ARMS AND HANDS

The next creative step in figure design is to break down the key components. This can be as simple as switching out a hand or popping the arms and legs off their assemblies. It has to be noted here that the LEGO Group does not condone this as it can lead to the fracturing or snapping of these components. However, with a careful application of force it is possible to remove the legs, arms and hands in so that you can replace them with alternative choices.

The black and red torso assembly shown here was sourced from the Alpha Team sets. By combining them with an altered leg assembly they take on the look of a medieval tabard. The final effect is then enhanced by shields with stickers from old Castle sets and helmets from the Viking

range.

Fantasy based LEGO themes such as the aliens in Star Wars offer rich pickings for minifigure designs. The soldier uses the Skiff Guard torso and leg combination. The tan arms in this instance were distracting from the final presentation, especially with the peasant hood completing the reddish brown tones of this design, so the arms were swapped.

Later in this feature, look out for the archers with a single brown hand to represent the protective guards and gloves they sometimes used.

KEY CONCEPTS

The hand, arm and leg colours can be rearranged subtly, but very effectively, to change the look of your minifigure designs.



OBSCURING FROM VIEW

Some elements of minifigure construction are not always seen in a finished model. This is why LEGO heads can feature doubled sided printing.

That also means it is worth thinking about how to place figures into a desired scene. The piano player's back is all that's visible, so undesirable prints on his front can be ignored, as the back is what is important here.

The next natural step from this can be seen with the design of the archers. The two torsos come from LEGO Harry Potter sets and seemed perfect for a tabard effect like the one shown earlier. Unfortunately these options have character names printed on the back. But when using them as archers, the quiver element obscures the names.

The Native American minifigures shown here combine these concepts.

The torso assembly comes from Star Wars: The Freemaker Adventures sets. The front of the torso was ineffective for use in the desired context; however, the back was ideal. By removing the arms and reversing them on the torso, the problematic portion is now reversed. The long hair piece then obscures the entire area at the back, while the ritual headdress hangs down in such a way as to hide just enough to blend into the finished design.

KEY CONCEPTS

Look for features of interest within a minifigure part before dismissing it. There are many ways you can obscure or hide the undesirable portions of printing in order to enhance the variety of designs you can achieve in your minifigures.

❏ YOU CAN OBSCURE OR HIDE THE UNDESIRABLE PORTIONS OF PRINTING ❏

You can hide unhelpful front printing in certain scenes.



The back printing makes their use limited.



Quivers cover the undesirable printing.



Fully converted for use outside of Harry Potter.



Take off the arms to invert the torso.



The unwanted jacket portion is now at the back.



Long hair and head dresses cover the unwanted print.



CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

The final step in figure design is to utilise components in a new or unusual manner. The soldier shown is a representation of gambeson armour. The main assembly comes from a the NINJAGO figure Sensei Wu. By placing the head into the hood first, you can push the two down to the point of contact with the shoulder pads, and simply make the figure marginally taller than normal.

Talented builder Dan Harris, of Brick to the Past, developed the excellent bonnet effect of the final figure design below. The hood is

actually an open faced Star Wars helmet that has been applied so that the neck protector sits on the top of the head instead.

KEY CONCEPTS

You do not need to constrain yourself to the official connections of a component. There are many figure pieces that can be utilised unconventionally to take advantage of how visually shapes and features change when placed into a new setting or at a new angle. ■

■ YOU DO NOT NEED TO CONSTRAIN YOURSELF TO THE OFFICIAL CONNECTIONS OF A COMPONENT ■



Shoulder pads prevent the hood piece going on normally.



With the head in the hood first it pushes down just enough to work.

The white bonnet is a Star Wars helmet reversed.



Name: Jonas Kramm
Website: jonaskramm.com

BOOK BACK

Jonas Kramm draws you into a fairy tale world with his stunning mushroom house

Words: Simon Pickard Pics: Jonas Kramm

THE SHAPING OF this mushroom house is phenomenal – at a glance, Jonas Kramm's creation barely looks like it is made from LEGO bricks. He has utilised quite large components in a smooth and understated way. Normally such pieces seem like sore thumbs in a creation, but here they are more carefully considered in their placement, which ultimately enhances the final design. This can only be achieved by having a sound grasp of the nuances in changing stud directions and angles.

Delving deeper into the design, there emerges a wide array of cleverly used elements. The snake for the water spout handle, the buildable figure shoulder panel for a wheel barrow and the

hair pieces for berries are worth a look. However, the book back serving as the supportive element of the window planter is the most interesting.

HE HAS UTILISED LARGE COMPONENTS IN A SMOOTH AND UNDERSTATED WAY

Jonas clearly has an eye for the details, which is essential in being more creative with LEGO parts. Here he has identified that the detailing on the spine of this book piece would provide the

supportive looking structure you often find under such window planters or shelves. Of course it takes more than just seeing the detail to work it into a creation, but Jonas was clearly up to the task.

To secure it to the house wall he will have taken advantage of the edge that minifigures can hold onto and connected into place with clips, allowing for the smooth floating finish. The planter itself makes great use of the double jumper plate to serve as both the body and provide connections for the plants themselves.

The model has reached 10,000 votes on LEGO Ideas, so will be considered for release as an official set. ■



WILLOW

The dramatic battle from George Lucas and Ron Howard's classic fantasy movie is recreated in this magical LEGO build

Words: Graham Hancock **Pics:** Tobias Roloff

INFO

IDEAS ID:

MontyMatte

PROJECT:

bit.ly/3Pu9Rv4



The castle and the characters.



WHILE HE STARTED his career playing Wicket the Ewok in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, Warwick Davis became a familiar face in 1988's *Willow*, the fantasy epic that saw him take on an epic journey alongside Val Kilmer. The *Willow* story will continue this year when a sequel series turns up on Disney+. It seems that Tobias Roloff couldn't have timed his build better. In this interview, he talks about his love of the movie and experience designing a MOC inspired by it.

Blocks: What's your own experience with Willow?

Tobias: As I first followed Willow and his friends through their wonderful tale, I was probably too young – about five years old. My father allowed me to watch some of his favourite movies on VHS – such classics as *Star Wars*, *Dark Crystal*, *Labyrinth*... and even *Willow*. Those were the days! I remember watching the scene where the evil queen Bavmorda turned all the attackers into pigs. It was very creepy for me as a child.

What do you like about it?

Knights and castles have always fascinated me. I can't remember exactly if it was because of *Willow* or LEGO first, but this movie certainly

played its part in the fact that I still like to immerse myself into fantastic worlds. Like many things at a young age, it's easy to fall under a spell. And *Willow* cast its spell on me. Even though there are some dark moments, there is also a lot of emotion in *Willow*. He discovers the baby Elora Danan and opens up his heart to her immediately. Although he has found a daikini – or human – called Madmartigan, who should protect the baby, he still continues to care for her instead of going home to his family. And he is the best protector she could ask for. I also love the magic in this movie. For example, the failed attempts to free sorceress Fin Raziel from her curse or how the troll is turned into a two-headed monster. And for sure the legendary pig scene I mentioned before. Finally it's a very funny movie – especially because of Madmartigan, 'the greatest swordsman that ever lived.' Val Kilmer is a great actor and this role is iconic. My thoughts are with him.

What inspired you to build this?

I had built some *Lord of the Rings* MOCs before and as a 1990s LEGO Castle fan, rewatching the movie *Willow* made me think it might be a

great combination. I had never free built a castle before.

All in all, the film offers some good elements for creativity – I suppose enough for a whole LEGO series. Because the battle at Tir Asleen is my favourite scene, it provided an excellent opportunity to build my own castle. It was the right challenge with some space to let my ideas run free.

Is this the first version of the MOC?

Yes, apart from a few improvements. I first built it with bricks from my inventory and the submission on LEGO Ideas was made with Studio. There is a first version with real parts and a digital second one – but all in all it's the same building. Currently I'm working on a small and probably last update concerning the two-headed monster.

Can you talk us through the design process?

My first step was to watch the film and especially the scene at castle Tir Asleen several times. I captured a lot of screenshots that could help me to develop a draft and I also took a closer look at well-known subscenes and details

The model opens up for playability.



that I wanted to implement. It was important to me to achieve a high level of detail without being overloaded as some builds can be. That isn't meant in a negative way – there are so many wonderful creations out there, but I was thinking about what the LEGO Group might approve. There was no template beyond the pictures and the ideas in my mind. Nevertheless, I made good progress at the start with the front wall. Then I worked on the side panels, the tree and finally the monster. During the whole process I wasn't afraid of changing details at the bottom if I didn't like how it was turning out, even if I had rebuild a lot. Unfortunately not every change was for the better, so I had to build it back again. All told, I am satisfied now. After building with real parts I recreated it with Studio and adjusted a few colours.

What was the most challenging thing about building it?

That was – and still is – Eberisk, the two-headed monster. The problem with this guy is that he is very ugly in the movie, like 1980s trash, and it's difficult to keep him appealing. I'm currently

working on the third version of that character.

If the project is approved, are there any compromises or changes you think the LEGO designers might have to make?

I'd suggest they should rework the Eberisk. They can probably find a solution that balances the movie appearance and a more appealing design. Unfortunately, I don't have a 3D printer – and new parts aren't allowed on the LEGO Ideas platform.

What kind of feedback have you had so far?

There has been a lot of great feedback. Many people asked how they can help besides voting and they just shared the project of their own accord. I was also grateful for constructive criticism and further conversations – whether it was about the project or something completely different. And then there are the Willow fans who, like me, saw the film as a child or at least a long time ago. It seems like they're glad to see something new about their favourite movie and it brings back some memories of their childhood. That's what makes me happy, quite apart from gathering votes.

The open back allows easy access.



ELSEWHERE ON LEGO IDEAS

There are dozens of projects on LEGO Ideas – here are just a couple worth checking out



IDEAS ID:
Jerac
PROJECT:
bit.ly/3RFYLoU

■ SONY WALKMAN

Anyone who remembers the revolutionary experience of being able to pop a cassette into a portable player and walk around listening to music will appreciate this tribute to the Sony Walkman. Now, everyone is used to playing music on demand wherever they are – back then, it was a gamechanger. The LEGO model can open up so a blocky cassette can be inserted into the brick Walkman and then removed again.

■ TOM & JERRY BOOKENDS



One way to create the beloved animated animals Tom & Jerry would be as typical LEGO figures. While this product idea does present them as figures, it puts them into a classic context from their cat and mouse game. Tom has an axe next to him as he reaches inside the mousehole – but naturally Jerry is well prepared. The clever presentation as bookends makes this a unique build on the platform.

IDEAS ID:
Darth_Ginger
PROJECT:
bit.ly/3IL5Mk6

Fancy getting your LEGO Ideas project featured in Blocks? Send it to graham@blocksmag.com with the subject title 'Blocks Ideas [your project name]'.

BLOCKS MOCS //

The latest selection of MOCs that have caught the attention of the Blocks team



MOC IN PICS // THE BATTLE OF MECHANICSVILLE

Word & Pics: Nick Goodman

ON JUNE 26, 1862, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia engaged the Union Army of the Potomac in one of the first major engagements in an episode of the Civil War that would come

to be known as the Seven Days Battles. I chose to build a MOC depicting this battle as we are approaching the 170-year anniversary of this point in the conflict between North and South.

The Civil War was a defining moment for the United States and, as a major history buff, I wanted to highlight a lesser-known engagement from a pivotal time in our nation's history.

One of the most important parts of the build was the inclusion of the church steeple. During this period these were often the tallest structures for miles and I wanted it to stand out above the battle raging below.

During this point in history armies still relied on shooting in lines using little to no cover. I wanted to include both a Union and Confederate squad lined up across from one another ready to fire.

In order to achieve that inset look for the windows, I shifted the entire assembly half a stud in to add some depth and texture to the church walls.

Many Civil War era photos display churches and I wanted to include such a structure as the centrepiece of this build.

In an effort to convey the size of this battle I included calvary, artillery and infantry units, showing just how many different individuals took part in these battles.

For the colour scheme of the environment I kept the palette very natural so that the white steeple and medium nougat church could stand out.



THE BATTLE OF MECHANICSVILLE
Builder: Nick Goodman // Flickr: Nicholas Goodman

MOC&A // SABRE ISLAND

A classic LEGO Pirates model is updated to give the Imperials a more substantial lookout tower

Word: Graham Hancock **Pics:** Marcin Damiński

SABRE ISLAND
Builder: Marcin Damiński // **Flickr:** Sleepless Night

The updated
Sabre Island.



IN THIS 90TH anniversary year, the LEGO Group has really embraced the idea of updating classic sets and themes. Fans have been at it for years though, as this excellent example of updating a beloved model shows. Marcin Damiński took 6265 Sabre Island from LEGO Pirates and reimagined it with modern techniques to give the Bluecoats a more impressive island tower.

Blocks: What do you love about LEGO Pirates?

Marcin: My first Pirates set was 6270 Forbidden Island. It was not as cool as the pirate ships already available at the time, but it was second best, with lots of awesome elements like palms, rope ladders, a hanging bridge, a crow's nest, a pirate flag, a shark, a boat and so on. The minifigures were also absolutely amazing for the era.

After that, my next set was 6265 Sabre Island. I was absolutely in love with the soldiers' uniforms, their gear and weapons. The building itself was very simple but had a perfect Caribbean vibe. These two sets, with the two small boats included, were enough to inspire epic battles between the pirates and the Bluecoats.

I think the main strength of the theme is that it brings a lot of play value even without any 'play features' – this world is just naturally full of life. When you hear 'pirates', you think 'adventure'.

What sparked the idea of updating classic sets?

My Dark Age came to an end when I saw two sets – 10193 Medieval Market Village and 10210 Imperial Flagship. They were cool and I could actually afford them now, so why not? I bought both those sets. I also dug out all the LEGO bricks from my childhood and built some simple scenes. I learned about the terms MOC and AFOL, then I could legitimately declare LEGO as my hobby. I also saw the modular buildings and I was utterly amazed. After that I think it was only natural to try and recreate some of the childhood memories in a more sophisticated form. I wasn't the only one to think this way, as shown by the release of 21322 Pirates of the Barracuda Bay.

What did you want to capture from the original Sabre Island?

First of course I wanted to capture the exotic vibe of the set. Second, this set was amazing in the way it was both large and small. The island looked like an accidental dot on the surface of the ocean. While the tower was pretty small, it still couldn't fit on the tiny, tiny island and a part of it stood directly in the water. But still there was enough space for a separate gun emplacement, somewhere to moor a boat and even a place for the crew to rest in the shadow of a palm tree.

Every aspect has been modernised.



What was the biggest challenge when reimagining it?

There were many small technical challenges, including the sloped walls, the railings and the cornice. I also put much effort into the furniture on the upper floor.

I wanted to use some printed pieces for decoration but these were hard to find or very expensive. Some of the pieces I really liked turned out to actually be stickers and, well, I don't like stickers. So I gave up on these and focused on brick-built ornaments.

I also wanted the build to be as small as

possible but when I tried to make it smaller, I found that it's barely possible to reach the interior, so it ended up really big compared to the original.

What are you happiest with about the finished build?

I think I caught the style of Caribbean architecture pretty well. The scene also conveys the feeling of loneliness on a tiny bit of land. While it may look pretty, you wouldn't want to get trapped there for too long! ■



A digital depiction of the MOC.

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REWIND



SPACE POLICE II

The 1990s saw Space Police return with a black and green colour scheme – even in the stars, there always needs to be LEGO law enforcement

Words: Graham Hancock **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, Brickset

THE ORIGINAL SPACE Police subtheme arrived in 1989, bringing the law to LEGO Space. Just a year later though, M-Tron was introduced, using a lot of red in the vehicles – just as Space Police had. When Space Police got a sequel in 1992, the models favoured a black, grey, red and transparent green look, once again distinguishing the faction from all of the others. It was part of a period in Space when the LEGO designers had moved away from bright colours and seemed to be inspired by darker, grittier sci-fi worlds.

In contrast to the black and grey bricks that most of the models were made up of, the transparent green cockpits really stood out and ensured that there was no missing these sets on the toy shop shelves. The boxes had the vehicles rolling over or flying across desert landscapes, with green lines across the starfield background.

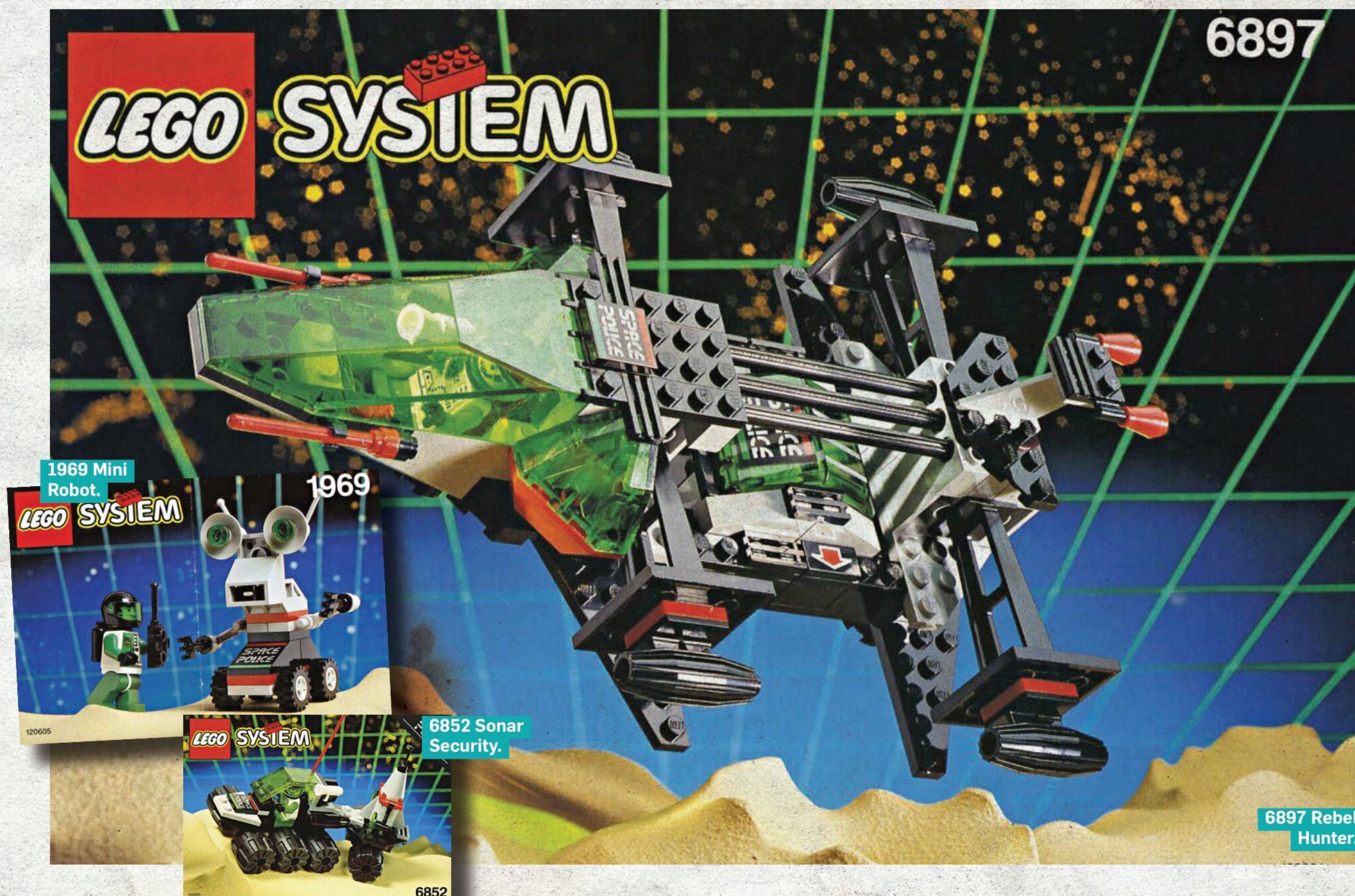
Each different sized build was unique, with 6897 Rebel Hunter, also known as Space Police Prisoner Patrol, a particularly interesting shape. The Technic axles that run down the centre of the model really give the

ship an intimidating feel, despite the lack of weaponry that is common to these vehicles.

LEGO catalogues revealed that the Galactic Council establish the law in the fictional Space galaxy and it's the job of the Space Police to enforce it. Part of their remit is protecting M-Tron against the threat from their enemies and tracking down Blacktron spies (although those massive letter Bs on their torsos probably make spying tricky).

By now the Classic Space logo was no longer featured on every minifigure torso, so the characters had more detailed printing that depicted their uniform and equipment. Unusually, printed text emblazoned 'Space Police' on the torsos alongside what is presumably life support gear. Most significantly though, the heads featured more than the classic eyes and smile for the first time in Space, adding eyebrows and comms equipment.

At the time Space was cycling through factions pretty quickly, so Space Police II was short lived compared to subthemes that had come before. Its legacy would continue in Space Police III almost 20 years later.





MEMORY LANE

'THE MINIFIGURES REALLY STOOD OUT FROM EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE SPACE THEME'

GRAHAM WAS KEEN TO STAGE EPIC BATTLES INVOLVING SPACE POLICE II

I was too young for the first round of Space Police, so when it returned for a sequel in the 1990s (and fortunately hung around on shelves longer than sets do today), I was able to admire this new Space faction. The minifigures were a particular point of interest as they really stood out from everything else in the Space theme, with more detail on the faces and the torsos.

The models themselves jumped out too, with the dark colour scheme really appealing to my sensibilities – they felt dramatic, just like the Blacktron II and M-Tron sets that were available at the time. Opportunities for conflict between the factions were clear and I was keen to get the Space Police involved with the intergalactic battles.

BREAKING DOWN THE THEME



- Space minifigures had more detailed faces for the first time.
- Printed 'Space Police' pieces appeared in all of the sets.
- 1916 Starion Patrol was rereleased later as 3015 Space Police Car in Japan.



MEMORY LANE

'THERE WAS A TIME WHEN MY PARENTS THOUGHT THAT I WOULD GROW OUT OF LEGO BRICKS'

DANIEL FACED AN IMPOSSIBLE DECISION AS A CHILD – SPACE POLICE II OR A MOUNTAIN BIKE?

It seems ridiculous now, but there was a time when my parents thought that I would 'grow out' of LEGO bricks. When Space Police II was still on shelves, I set my sights on its largest set, 6984 Galactic Mediator. At that age I was a certified LEGO Space nut and I wanted to pit that behemoth against my 6973 Deep Freeze Defender from Ice Planet. However, I was nearing 10 years old, and my father expected that soon I would shift interests to something 'older' and regret spending so much money on a 'child's toy'.

Accordingly, when I had saved up enough money to purchase the object of my desire, he came to me with a proposition. Forgo the Galactic Mediator in favour of getting a mountain bike. If I agreed, he would split the cost of the bike 50:50. All of my friends were starting to get mountain bikes at this time, so I took him up on his offer. To this day I still enjoy mountain biking, so it worked out well, although I did miss out on adding the Mediator to my childhood collection.

As you can tell, I proved my dad very wrong about growing out of the LEGO hobby so years later was able to acquire the entire theme. I don't regret getting the bike, but I would have had a lot of fun with more Space Police II sets in my youth.

BY THE NUMBERS
YEARS ACTIVE:

1992-1993

7

SETS

3

BLACKTRON PRISONERS

12

WHEELS ON 6957 SOLAR SNOOPER

406

PIECES IN 6984 GALACTIC MEDIATOR, THE LARGEST SET

7

PIECES WITH 'SPACE POLICE' PRINTED ON THEM IN 6984

23

PIECES IN 1916 STARION PATROL, THE SMALLEST SET

REVIEW

Year of release: 1992 **Aftermarket price:** £47 new, £7 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 24

6813 GALACTIC CHIEF

THERE'S SOMETHING REALLY special about the one-minifigure fighters that were common in 1980s and 1990s Space. Often they didn't seem terribly practical, but to get something for such a low price meant that any open cockpits or other flaws can easily be overlooked.

6813 is a particular delight as it features the transparent green canopy, the printed Space Police slope and a nice mix of black and grey. The Chief himself (also known as Captain Magenta) sports epaulettes to designate his rank as the piece makes a rare appearance outside of Pirates.

Ready to enforce space law.



Year of release: 1992 **Aftermarket price:** £163 new, £64 used / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 255

6957 SOLAR SNOOPER

IN THE 1990S, there were huge differences in the quality of the LEGO sets released – some were excellent, some were awful. Fortunately, 6957 Solar Snooper is a great example of 1990s LEGO design at its best.

This model is incredibly distinctive, with the elongated 'nose' giving it a unique silhouette and suggesting the possibility of subterranean travel. Chunky wheels are always a delight and there's a satisfying dozen of them in this set. The model has a prison cell at the centre that can be detached. In a very cool touch, the back section is a trailer – the dual cockpits section can detach and fly away from the main vehicle. As an independent flyer it's unique and can pick up the prison cell.

As was the case in a few Space sets of the era, the designers did get carried away with

use of the printed Space Police parts (perhaps these law enforcers were really keen on being a deterrent) – but for those who plan to rebuild it anyway, these parts are very appealing.

One of the fun things about Space Police is the idea of who they are after – in the case of

this set, it's a Blacktron II minifigure who had been avoiding space taxes, or whatever crimes these guys were getting involved in. He's only just outmatched in this set though, as there are only two Space Police II minifigures – yet there's room at the controls for four of them.



That's a lot of wheels.

Year of release: 1992 **Aftermarket price:** £771 new, £122 used / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 406

6984 GALACTIC MEDIATOR

THE BIGGEST MODEL in the Space Police II subtheme is 6984 Galactic Mediator, suggesting a little less action than the children who received it might have imagined, also known as Space Police Commander. It combines an Earthly shuttle shape with a utilitarian look. Black and grey go well together, with the splashes of red and green giving the faction their own distinct colour scheme.

As is typical for these sets, there's a standard-size prison cell that is built before the main model – in fact there are two this time around. One can be carried by the little rover vehicle that fits inside the back of the Mediator or they can be docked in the vessel's wings.

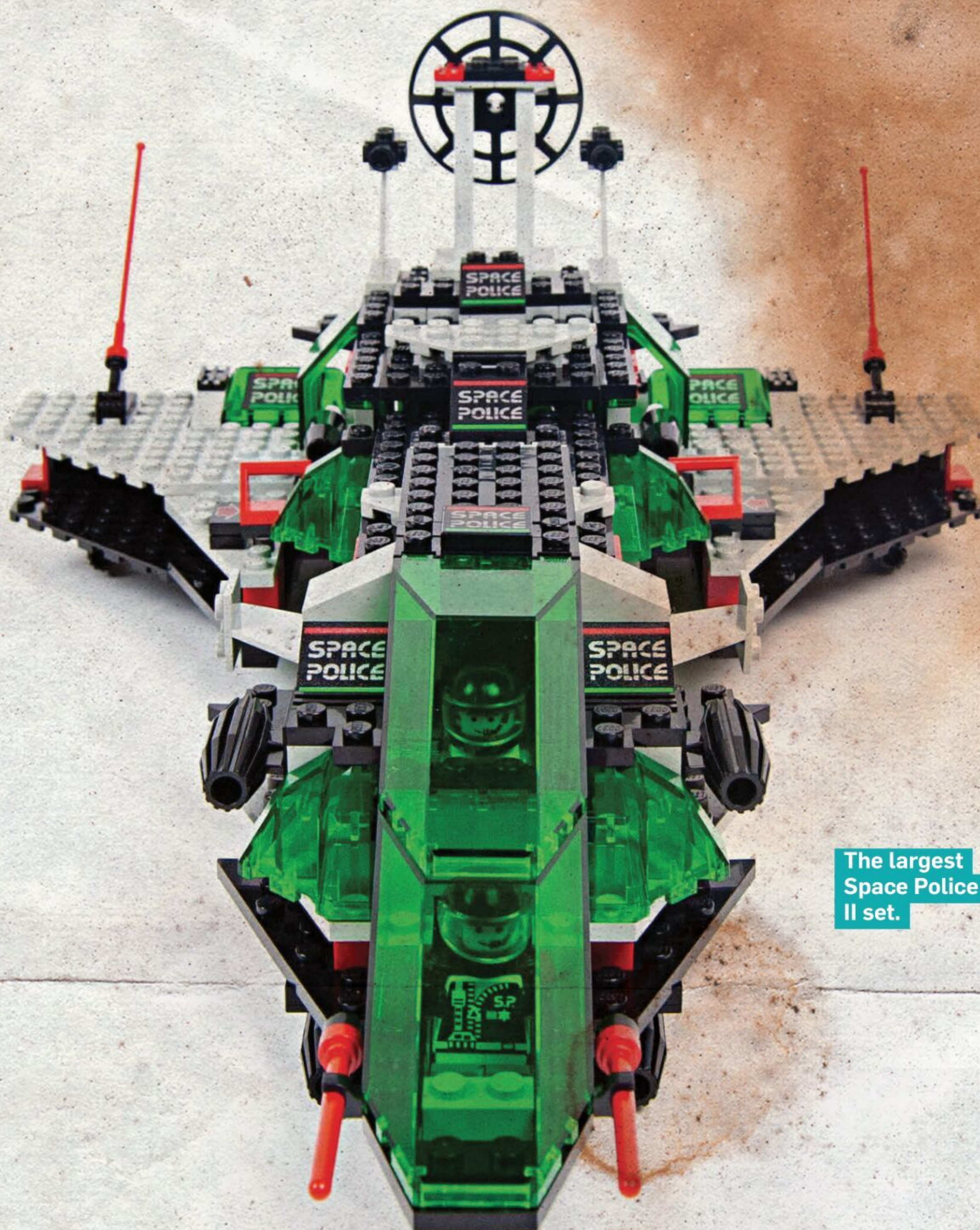
Like 6957 Solar Snooper, the set is very keen to make you aware that it's Space Police – the logo appears seven times on the spaceship and given the lack of weapons, it seems pure intimidation is what the green guys are going for.

One of the nice touches in this set is that it's modular – the cockpit, middle section and wing section are built separately and are then combined. There's plenty of room inside for minifigures, so more Space Police II enforcers can be carried there. They will be needed, as there are only two in the set.

While it's disappointing to only get two characters from the faction, they are excellent minifigures. Space Police II marked the first time that additional printing was used on the minifigure faces and the comms equipment looks great. The torsos are also more detailed than was common at the time, with a retro-futuristic quality to them. Green legs with white hips really complete the aesthetic nicely.

Space Police II is such a strong collection of sets that it's hard to declare 6984 'the best', but it's certainly one of the top models in the subtheme and unsurprisingly commands high prices on marketplace websites.

Watch out, Blacktron minifigures.



The largest Space Police II set.



RE-BUILD

PRISON BLOCK

It's time to lock up the law breakers of the LEGO galaxy in this Space Police II prison block

Words & Pics: Daniel Konstanski

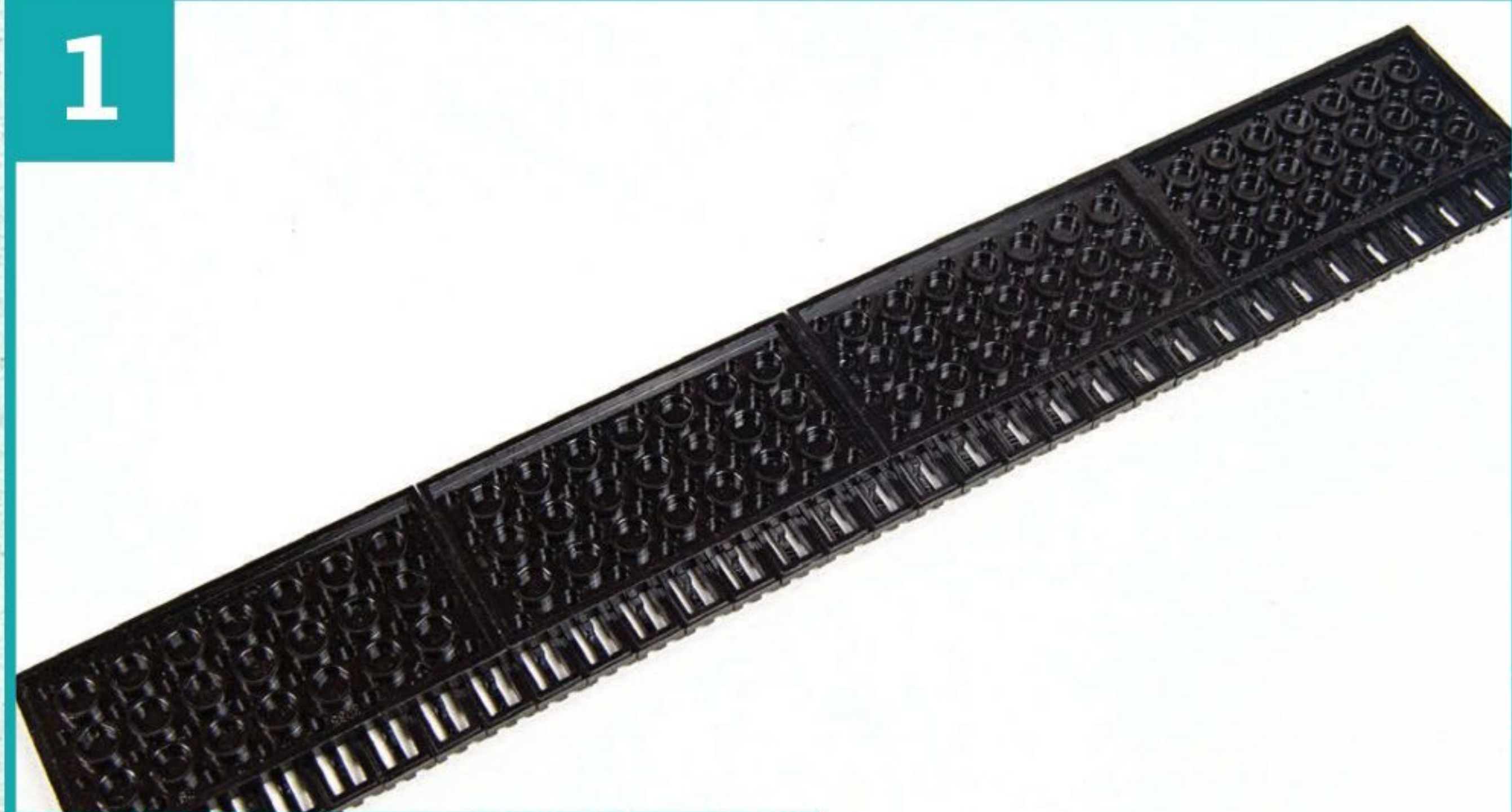
SPACE POLICE II sounds like a theme that would have a jail set. Considering the LEGO Group's propensity at the time for cells in Castle, Town and Pirates sets, it seems strange that they limited Space Police II to incarceration pods on each of the vehicles with no central lock up.

Years later, Space Police III included a formal prison set, which makes perfect sense for the theme – it gives outlaws and space bandits a place to break their buddies out of. For whatever reason, no such set was created for the 1992 theme, making it the perfect build for Blockstalgia.

This is a starting point – you could get really carried away and build a huge complex with rows upon rows of cells filled with Spyrius, Blacktron, UFO and Insectoid minifigures, a rogue's gallery of classic 1980s and 1990s Space villains. To give a taste of what such a model could be, here is a cell block that you can repeat as many times as you like. ■



1



Begin by laying down a 32-stud long floor.

2



Black and red, of course.

3



Widen the floor.

4



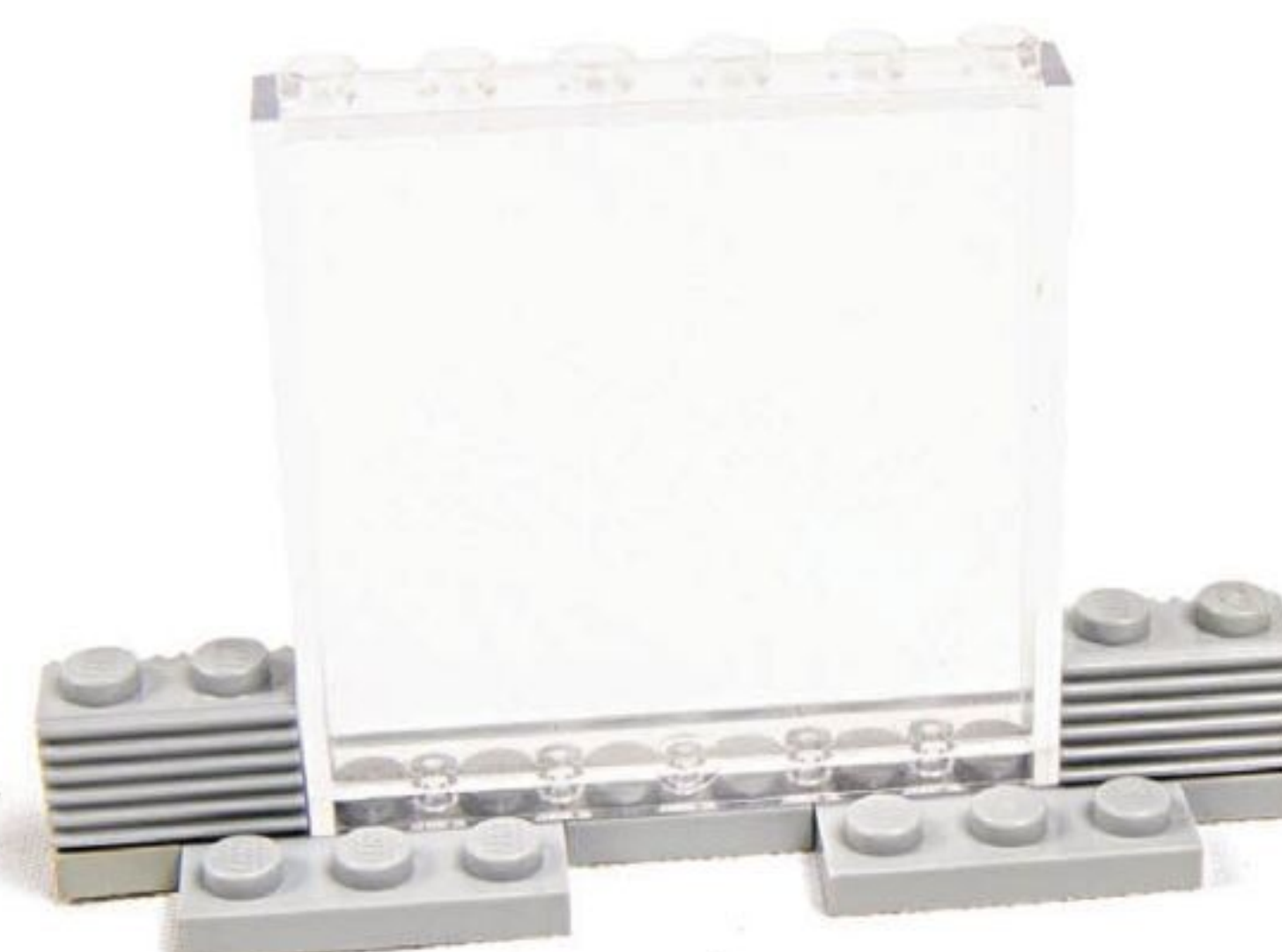
These parts will join with the jail cell facades.

5



Construct the base of the façade.

6



Use a clear 1x6x5 panel.

7



Add textured bricks on each side.

8



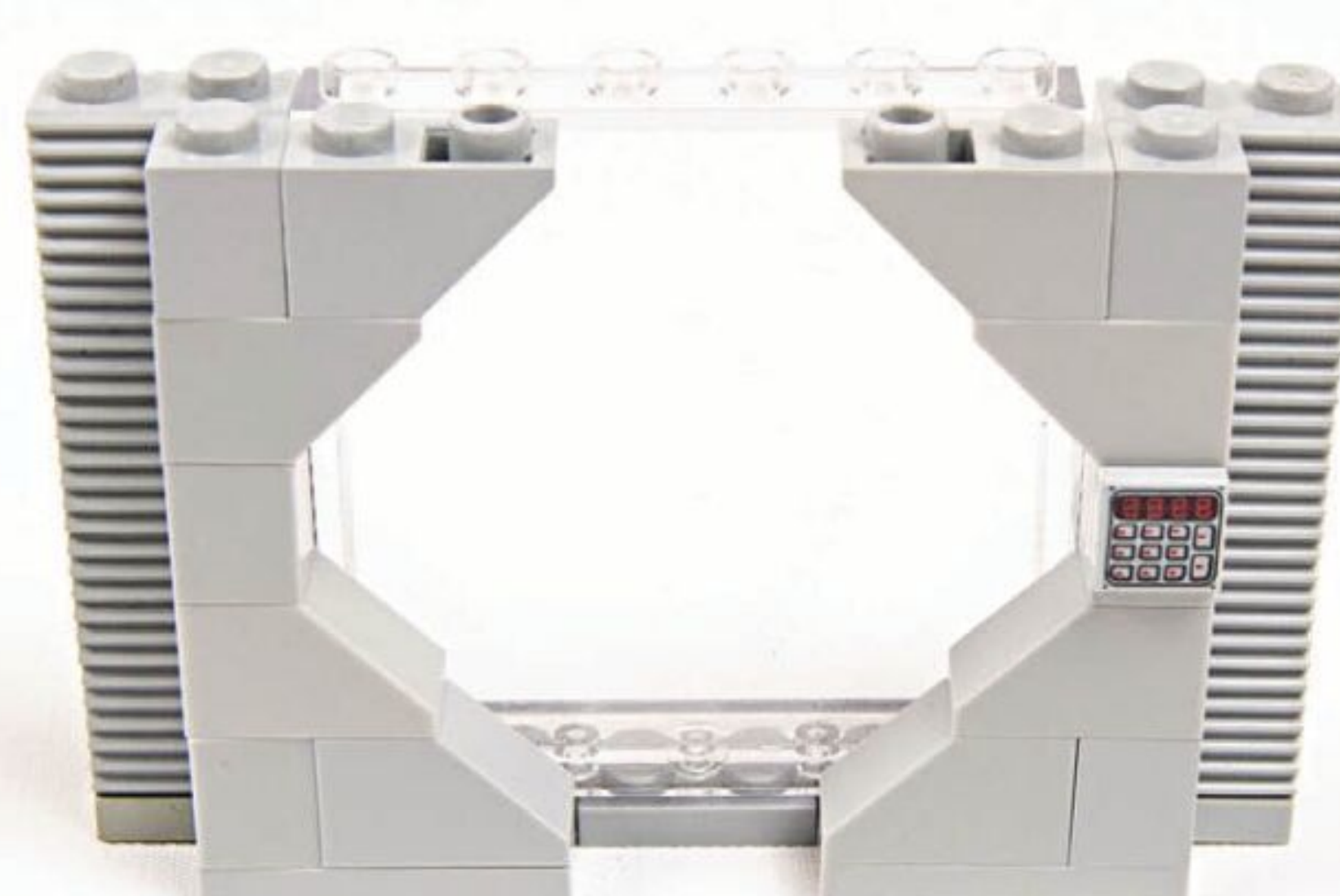
Build up with slope bricks.

9



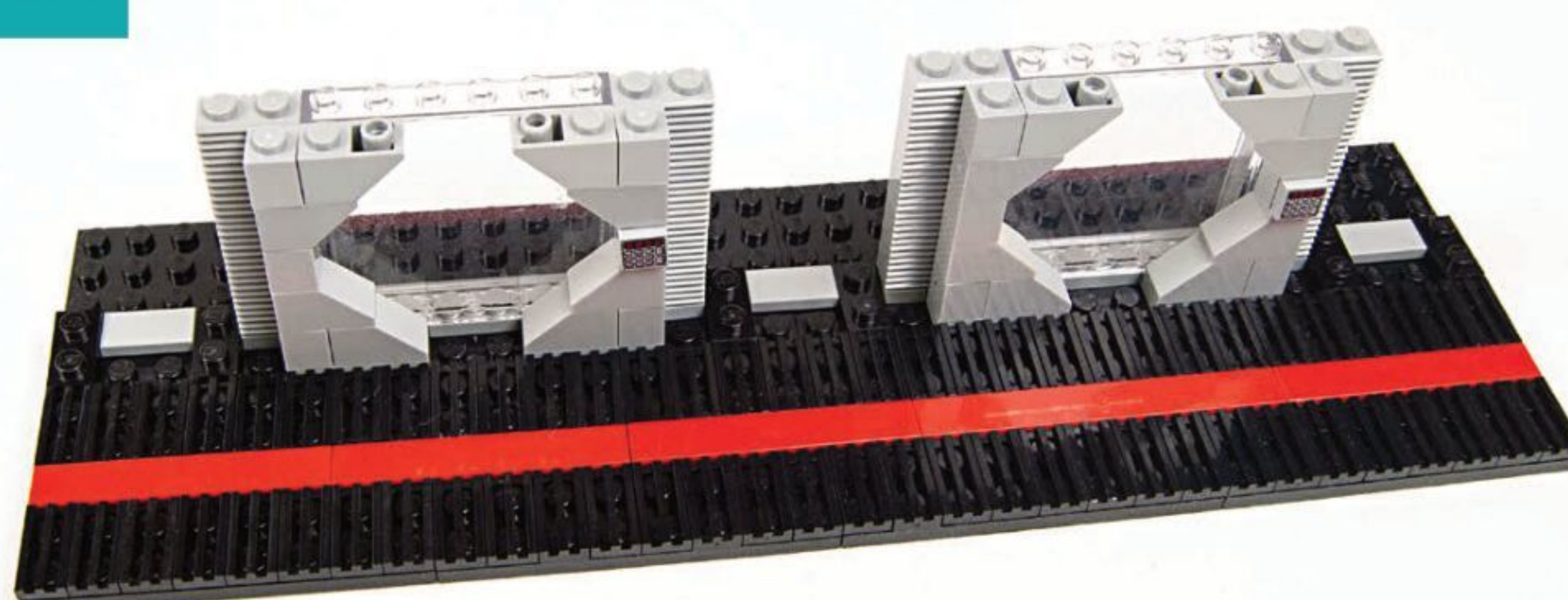
Construct the rest of the façade.

10



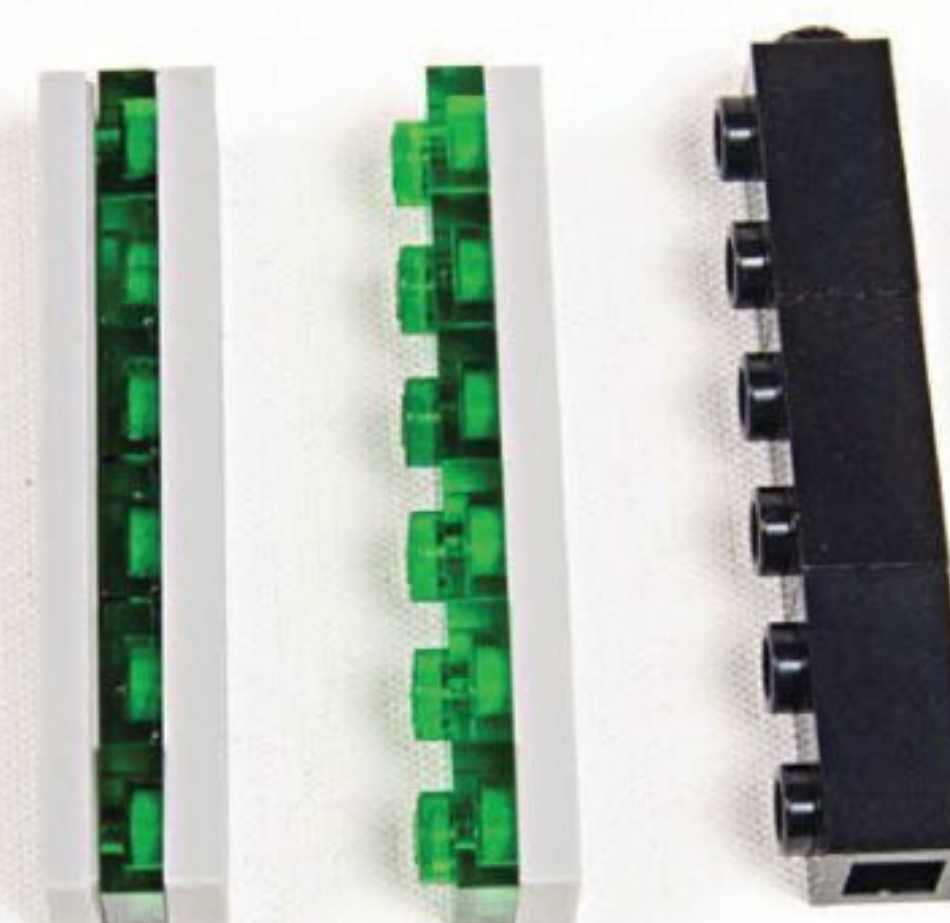
Inverted slopes at the top.

11



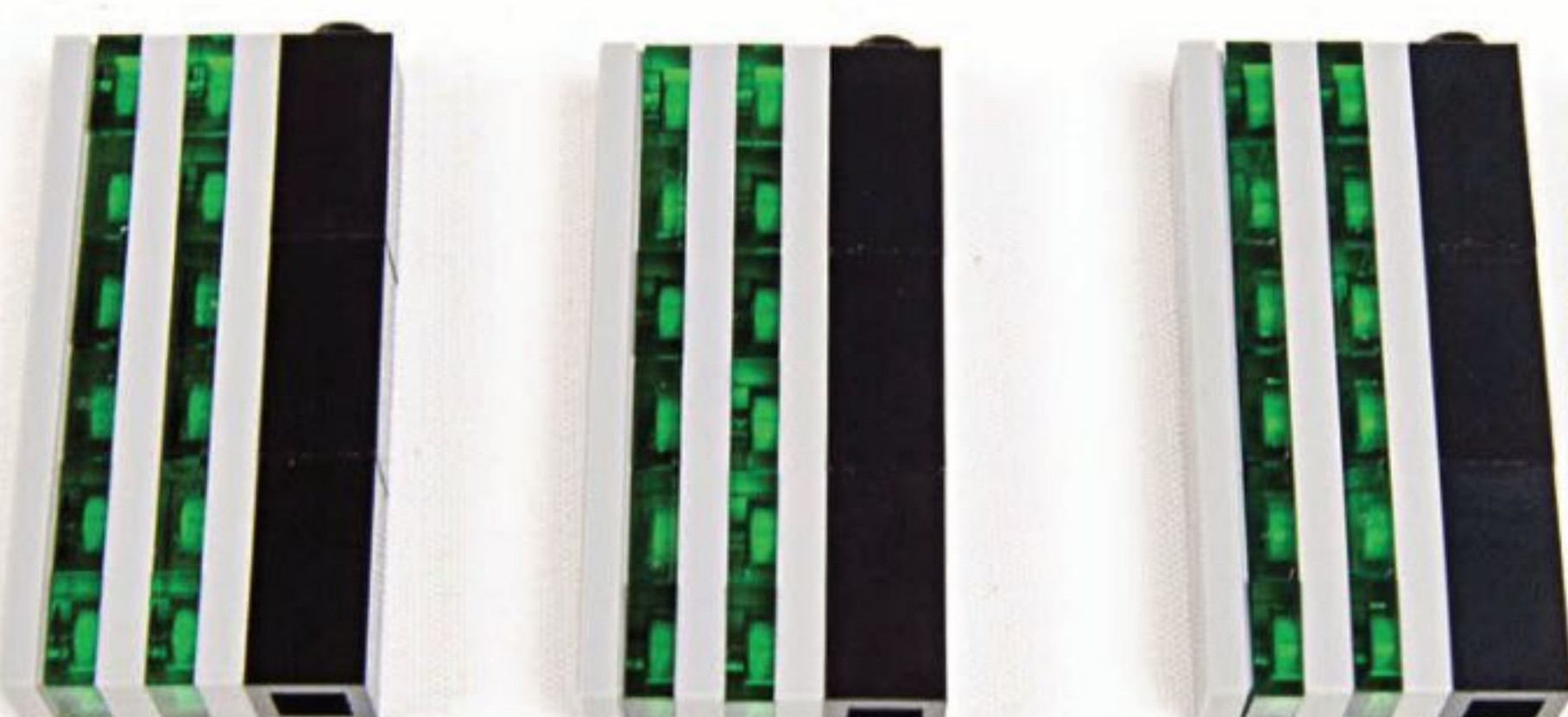
Duplicate the façade and attach.

12



Use transparent dark green plates.

13



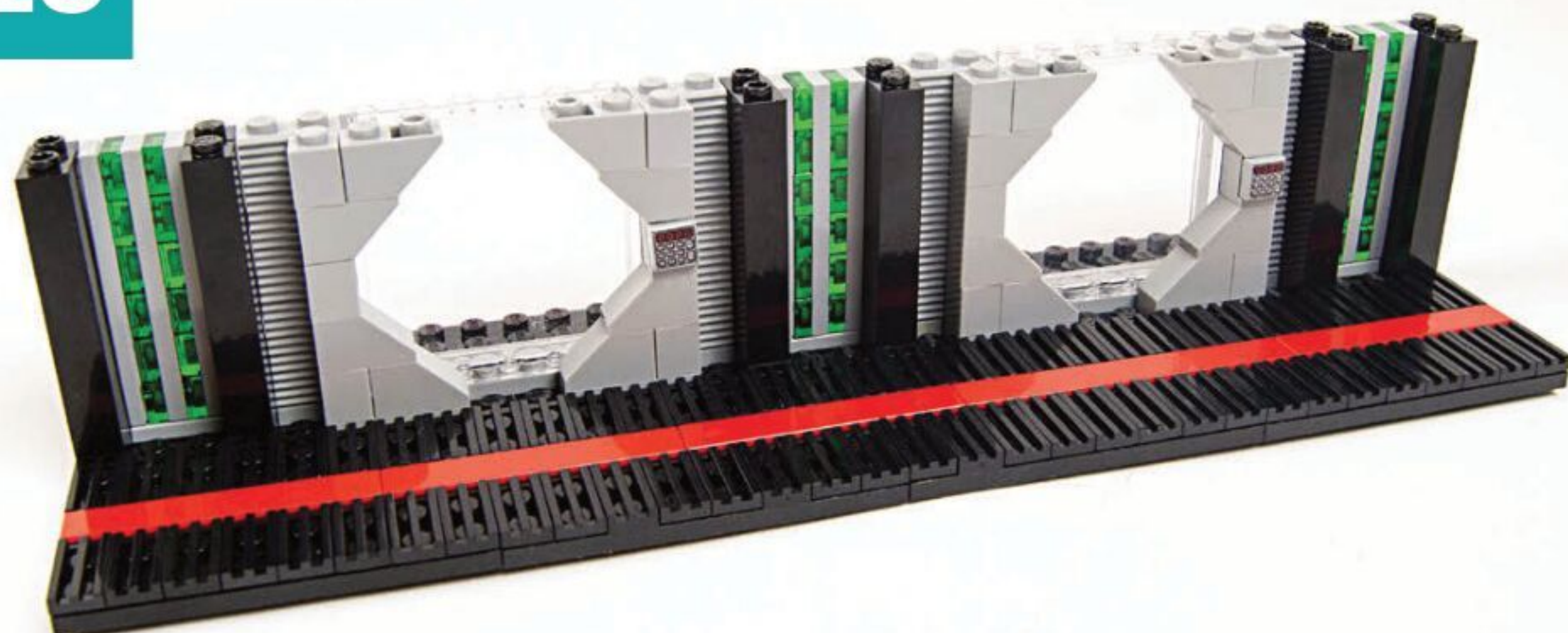
Build three as shown.

14



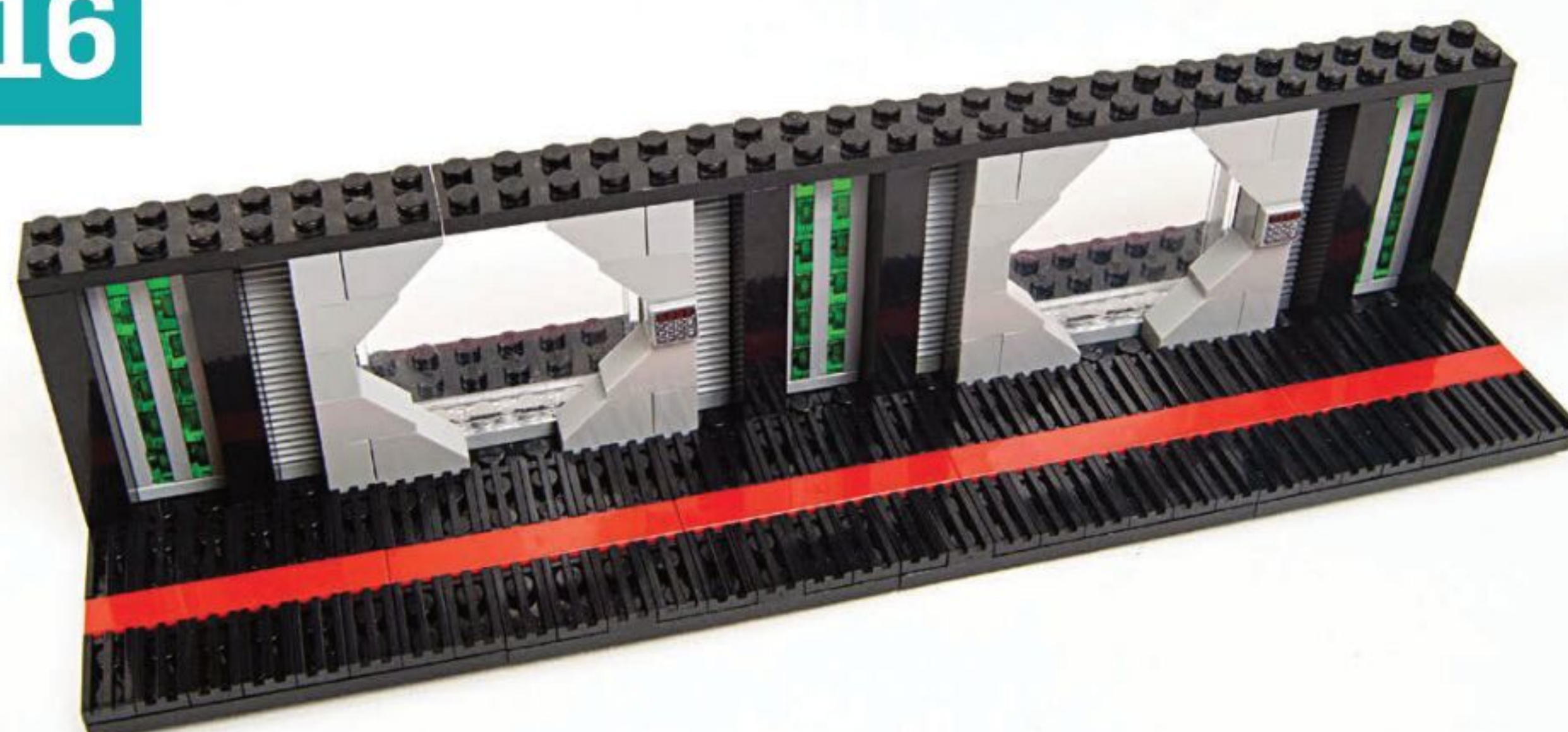
Add the three wall sections to the build.

15



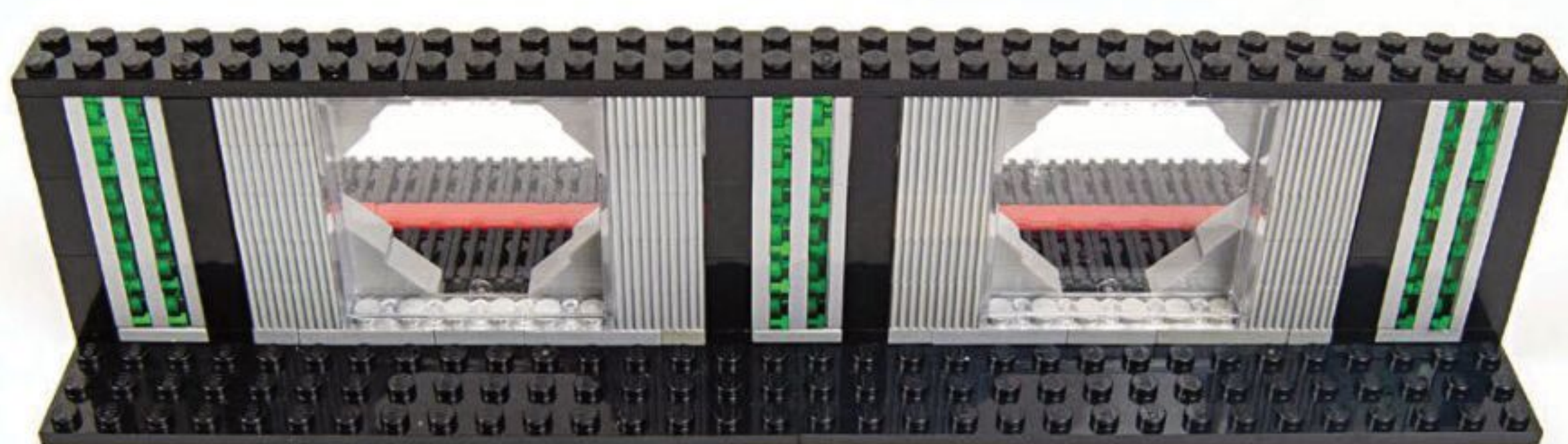
Complete the walls with the protruding sections.

16



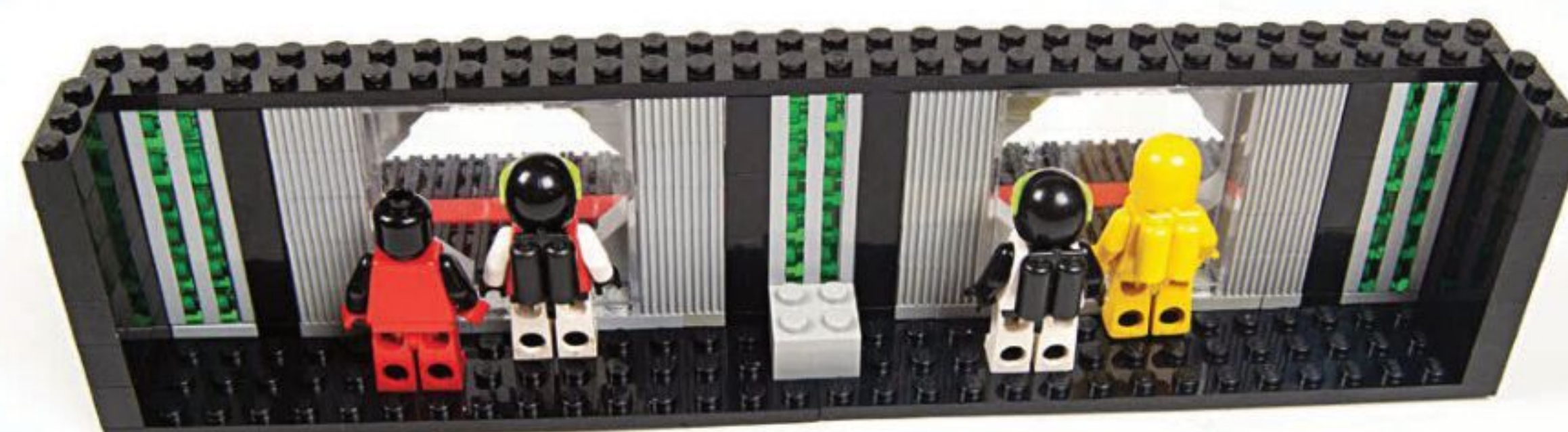
Place two stud wide plates across the top.

17



Rotate the build.

18



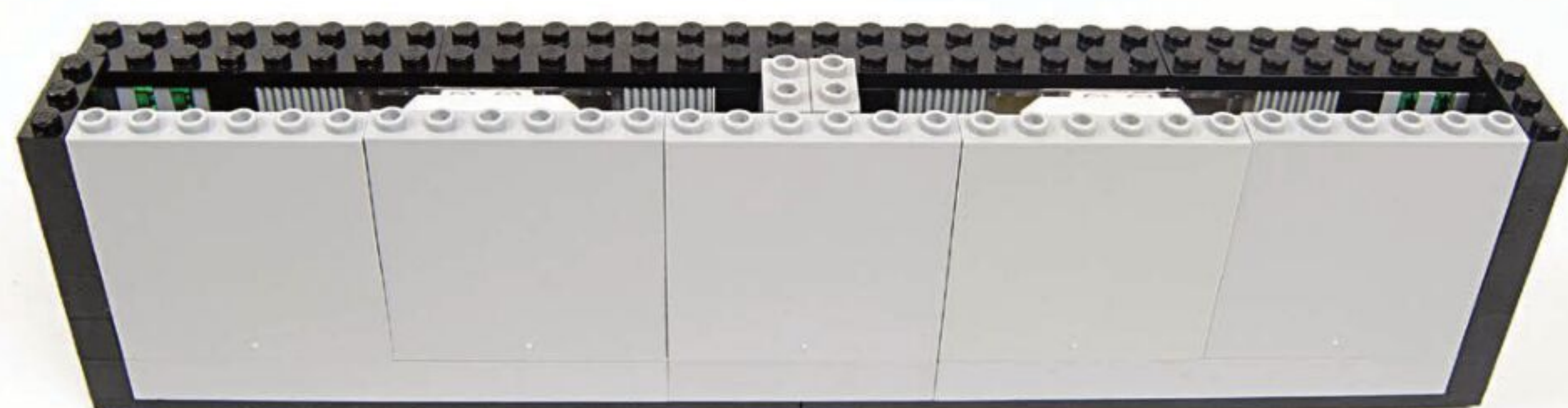
Imprison some minifigures.

19



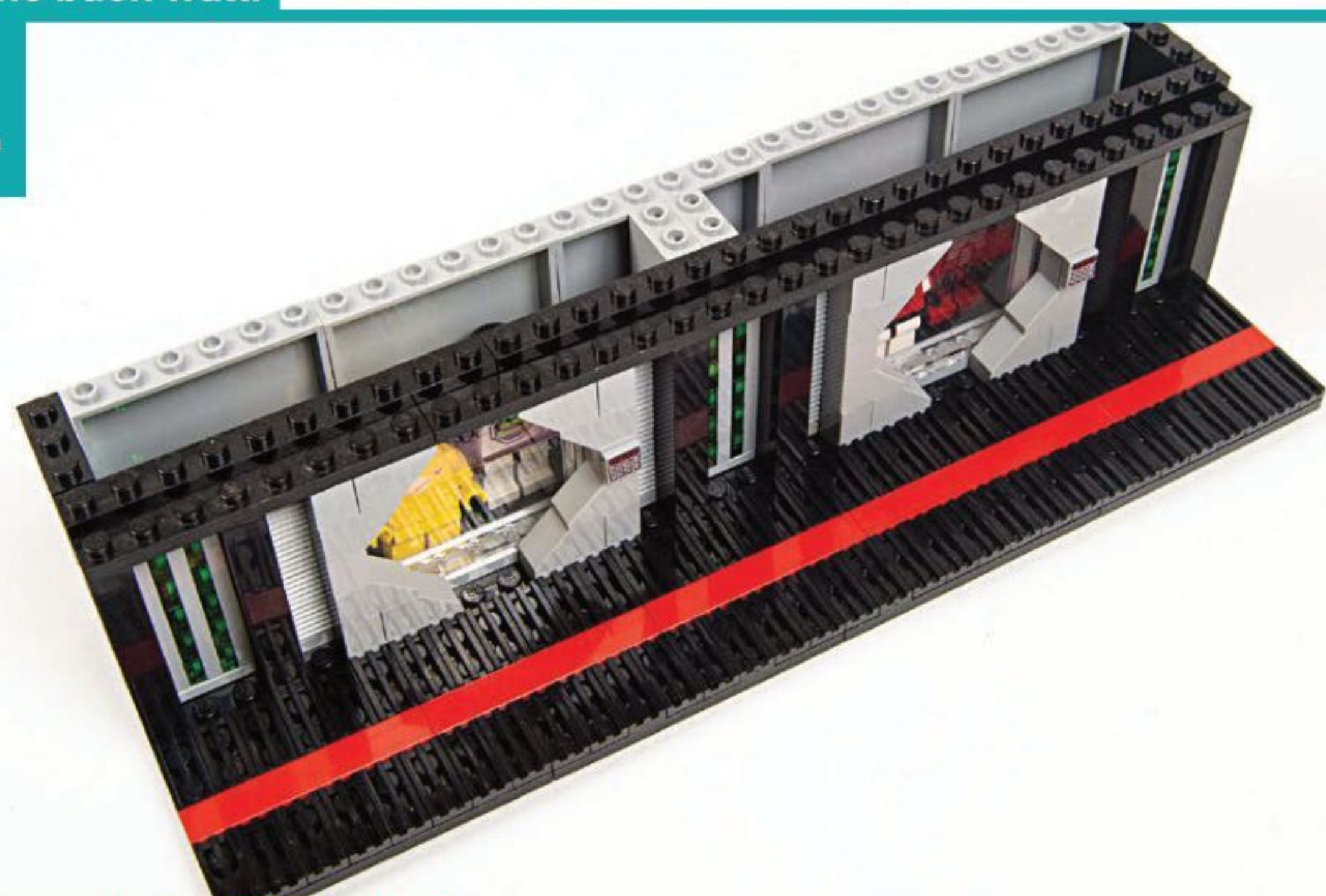
Start the back wall.

20



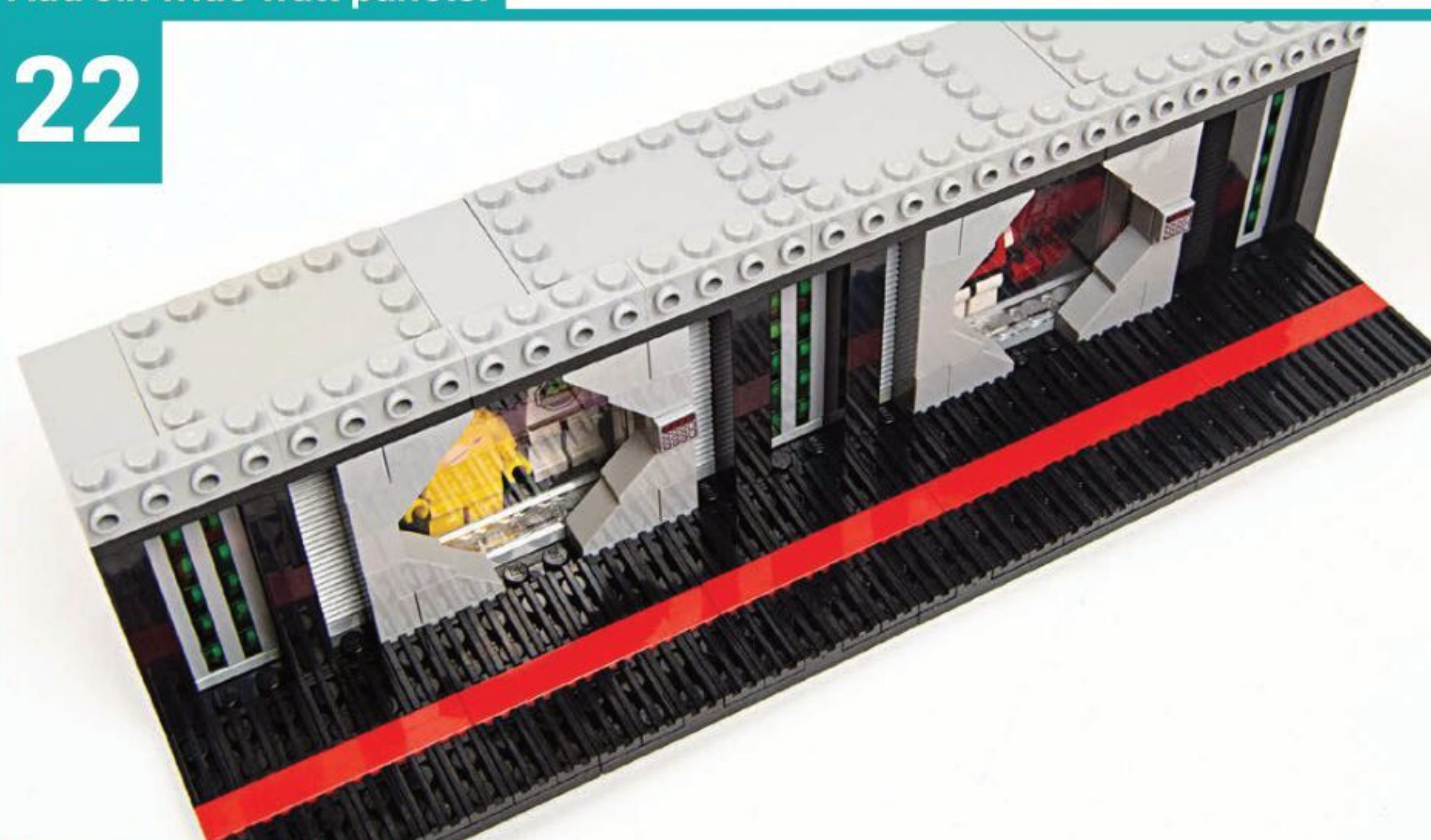
Add six wide wall panels.

21



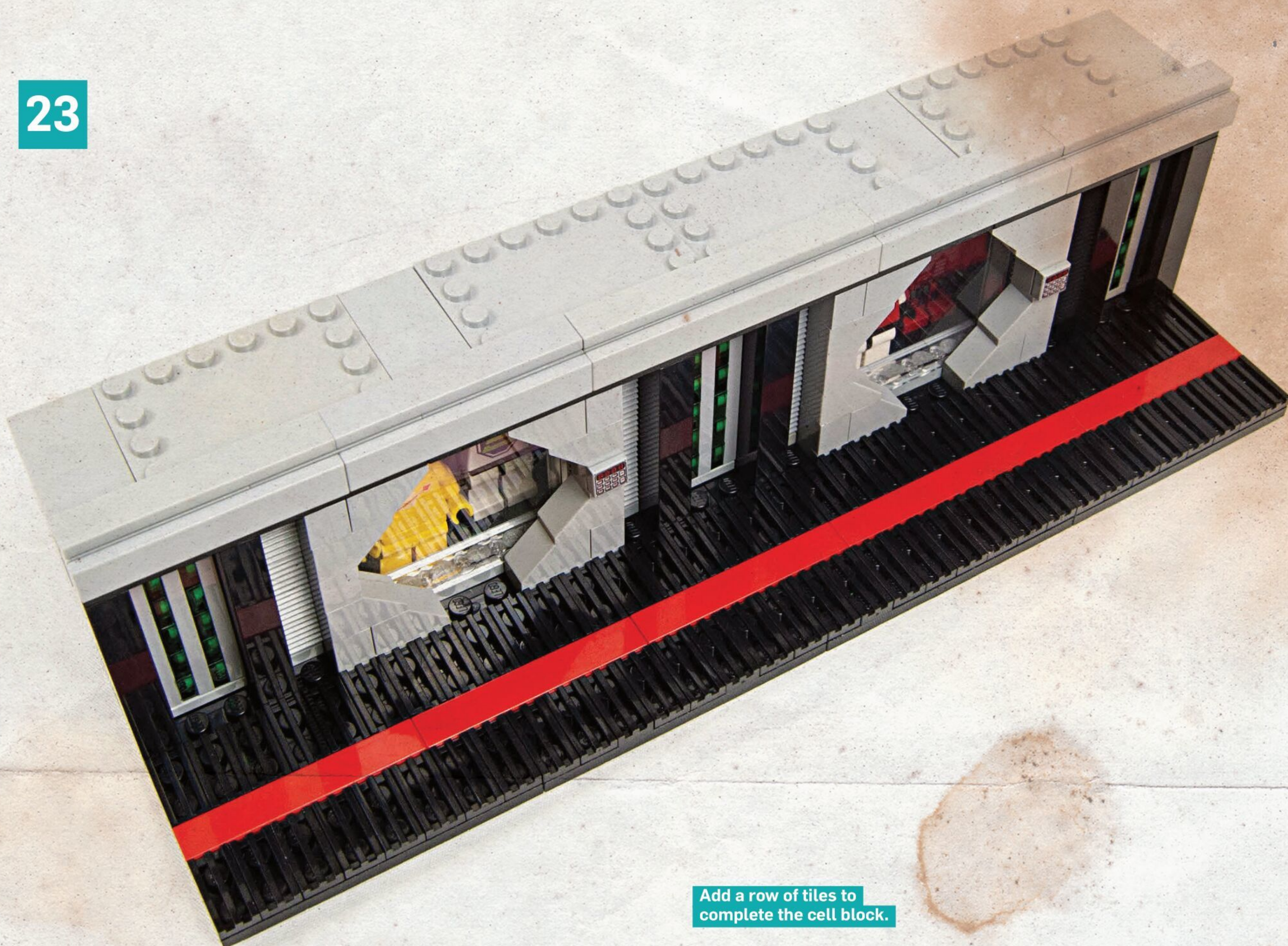
Attach one stud wide plates.

22

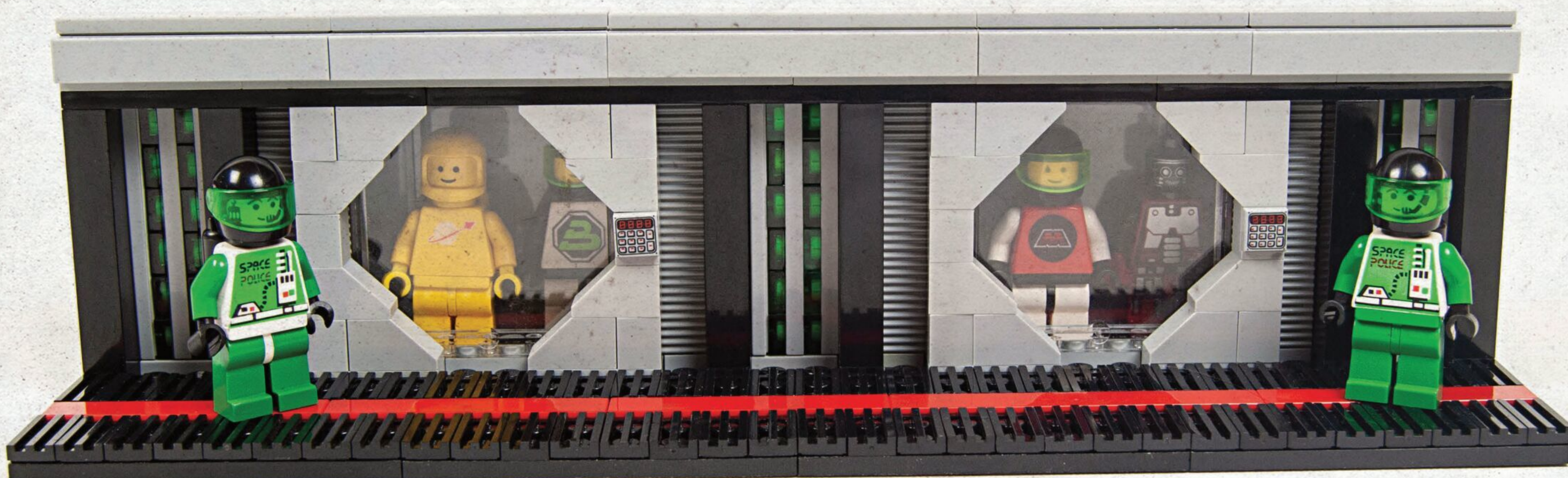


Place a roof on the top.

23



Add a row of tiles to complete the cell block.



Blocks

BRICKIONARY

The language of LEGO has a wide, varied and ever-growing vocabulary.
Blocks magazine helps you to decode it

A

ABS: Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. The plastic most LEGO parts are made from.

AFOL: Adult Fan of LEGO.

B

Billund: Town in Denmark where the the LEGO Group was founded and the headquarters is located.

Bley: Bluish grey. Refers to the current LEGO grey, compared to the old version (known as... old grey).

BrickLink: The online marketplace for buying and selling LEGO bricks, now owned by the LEGO Group.

Brickset: An online database of LEGO sets.

Brick Train Awards: Annual fan organised train building contest.

BURP: Big Ugly Rock Piece. Moulded piece five bricks high with jagged edges.

C

Cheese Slope: A sloping LEGO part, named after the fact yellow pieces look like a wedge of cheese.

Clone Brands: Knock-off construction toys that copy aspects of, or sometimes entire, official LEGO sets.

Custom: A LEGO creation or individual element that uses non-LEGO parts, modified parts or accessories from third party vendors like BrickArms or BrickForge.

Customiser: A LEGO fan who's not afraid to modify LEGO parts. Customising may include painting, cutting, drilling, melting or adding non-LEGO parts to a creation. Considered heresy to the purist LEGO fan.

D

D2C: Direct to Consumer sets. Generally exclusive to LEGO stores, with high piece counts.

Dark Ages: The period in a LEGO fan's life when they set aside LEGO in favour of other, non-LEGO pursuits.

Draft: An activity common at LEGO

club meetings in which fans each bring a LEGO set, sort out all the elements and then take turns in picking out the type of part they want. An easy way to obtain parts in large quantities without buying multiple parts of the set yourself.

E

Erting: A 1x1 brick with one stud on its recessed side, named after its designer.

Evergreen: A theme that returns year after year, rather than only being available for one or two years.

G

Greeble: Pseudo-technical detail added to a LEGO creation to enhance its appearance, often seen in LEGO Space and Mecha creations.

GWP: Gift with purchase. A promotional item or set obtained by spending a minimum amount at LEGO Stores or LEGO.com.

H

Half-Stud Offset: A building technique that allows building without regards to standard alignment of studs on a plate, usually achieved with a jumper plate.

I

Ideas: Platform for fans to upload set ideas with the potential for them to become official LEGO releases.

Illegal: LEGO building techniques that break the 'rules' for connections between LEGO elements used by official LEGO set designers, particularly connections that stress the LEGO elements.

Inventory: The list of LEGO elements included in an official LEGO set. Several LEGO fan sites host set inventories including Peeron, Brickset and BrickLink.

IP: Intellectual property. The LEGO Group has many IP partners, such as Disney and Nintendo.

J

Jumper Plate: A 1x2 or 2x2 LEGO plate with only one stud in the centre. Useful for half-stud offset building.

K

KFOL: Kid Fan of LEGO. The LEGO Group's primary target demographic of between 5-12 years.

L

LCP: LEGO Certified Professional. A professional brick builder authorised by and affiliated with the LEGO Group.

LDD: LEGO Digital Designer. Free software for PC and Mac that lets you build LEGO models virtually.

Legal: LEGO building techniques that follow guidelines for official LEGO set designers.

LEGOLAND: Family theme parks inspired by the LEGO brand. The original location is in Billund, but now found all around the world.

LEGO Masters: The competitive televised building contest, with local versions airing globally.

LEGOs: Incorrect plural of LEGO.

LLDC: LEGOLAND Discovery Centre. A mini, indoor versions of the theme parks aimed specifically at children.

LUG: LEGO User Group. Local or regional LEGO clubs that meet and interact primarily in an offline 'real-world' context. This is changing as the number of online LUGs grows.

M

Microfig: Small figures, like those in the LEGO Games series.

Midi Scale: Refers to sets that are between miniature and minifigure scale. They do not include minifigures but are more detailed than mini sets. So far only Star Wars sets have midi versions.

Minifigure Scale: A LEGO creation built for the scale of standard LEGO minifigures.

MOC: My Own Creation. A model designed and built by a LEGO fan without instructions. Often used as a verb, 'MOCing'.

Mod: A modification of an official LEGO set, usually changing part colours or



adding to original designs.

N

NPU: Nice part usage. Taking a LEGO element and using it a new or unexpected way, usually different to the way it is most commonly used.

P

PAB: Pick-A-Brick. Buying individual bricks in the quantities needed from the LEGO Group's online or physical stores.

PAB Wall: The Pick-A-Brick wall found at official LEGO stores.

Purist: A LEGO fan who only uses official LEGO elements. Can be applied to LEGO creations that only contain official LEGO elements with no modifications or custom parts.

S

S@H or SAH: The official online store, LEGO.com. Used to be Shop at Home.

Sigfig: The minifigure version of a LEGO fan that is used in online communities as an avatar or 'signature minifigure'.

SNOT: Studs Not On Top. A building technique that places elements on their sides or even upside down to achieve a smooth surface.

T

TFOL: Teen Fan of LEGO.

TLG: The LEGO Group, the privately held parent company for all LEGO-related brands and companies worldwide.

TMA: Too many acronyms.

TRU: Toys R Us.

U

UCS: Ultimate Collector Series. A line of large LEGO Star Wars sets designed for older teens and adults.

V

Vignette: A small scene recreated on a square plate, generally 8x8 studs.

W

WIP: Work in progress, usually referring to a MOC.

BASIC BRICKS

Baseplates: The foundation for many projects, be it houses, space bases or castles. They're normally thin plates with no connections underneath so you can only build on top. Some older sets included raised baseplates resembling rocks, hills and other landscaping.

Bricks: At the core of LEGO is the basic brick. They come in a wide range of sizes, usually denoted by their stud pattern – i.e. 2x2, 2x6 – and in a huge colour palette.

Measurements: LEGO fans usually refer to parts by the number of studs they have. For example, a brick that has two studs on the short side and four studs on the longer side would be called a 2x4 brick.

Plates: Thinner than bricks but not as thin as baseplates. Three plates stacked together equals the height of one standard brick. Can be joined from above or below like standard bricks.

Printed Parts: Can be bricks, plates or tiles. They come with printed designs, often referred to as decorated parts.

Studs: The fundamental joining method of basic LEGO bricks.

Tiles: Thin, like plates but without any studs on top (see SNOT).

■ If you can think of a widely-used LEGO term that's not in the Brictionary, drop us a line at graham@blocksmag.com to get it included.



LEGO EVENTS

Do you run a physical or virtual event that should be listed here? Get in touch with us via graham@blocksmag.com and we'll add it to the list

EVENTS ARE LIKELY TO BE CANCELLED AT SHORT NOTICE DUE TO THE ONGOING PANDEMIC, EVEN IF NOT SPECIFIED BELOW. PLEASE CHECK WITH ORGANISERS BEFORE TRAVELLING.

AUGUST 2022

Redhill Brick and Model Show (UK)

When: August 6

Where: Redhill, Surrey

What's on: A selection of LEGO displays and layouts.

Visit: facebook.com/redhillbrickandmodelshow

Hall of Bricks (UK)

When: August 13

Where: Victoria & Albert Halls, Aberdeen

What's on: Large scale builds, games, robots, build competition and raffle.

Visit: facebook.com/events/780649889768881

Rhyl Building Bricks (UK)

When: August 13

Where: Rhyl, North Wales

What's on: LEGO displays and activities at Wales' only LEGO show.

Visit: facebook.com/RhylBB

Hull Brick Fest (UK)

When: August 13 – 14

Where: Guildhall

What's on: LEGO displays by Sheffield LUG and friends along with LEGO activities in the centre of Hull, plus specialist LEGO traders.

Visit: facebook.com/SheffieldBrickFest

SEPTEMBER 2022

Ely Brick Show (UK)

When: September 3

Where: King's School, Ely

What's on: Fantastic LEGO models, great ball contraptions, special guests and activities for children, in aid of Ely Christians Against Poverty.

Visit: elybrickshow.co.uk

Huddersfield Brick Show (UK)

When: September 25

Where: St. Phillips Community Centre, Huddersfield

What's on: New for 2022, a LEGO show with activities, displays and trade stalls in Huddersfield.

Visit: facebook.com/huddbrickshow

BrickCon (USA)

When: September 29 – October 2

Where: Seattle Center, Washington

What's on: View thousands of models created by adult LEGO hobbyists from across the USA. Purchase current, past and custom LEGO sets, parts and minifigures. Special registration option and content for AFOLs.

Visit: brickcon.org

OCTOBER 2022

Great Western Brick Show (UK)

When: October 1 – 2

Where: STEAM Museum, Swindon

What's on: This long-running LEGO show is back for 2022, with many LEGO layouts and displays, plus interactive activities.

Visit: greatwesternbrickshow.com

Bricklincs (UK)

When: October 8

Where: Christ's Hospital School, Lincoln

What's on: This long-running LEGO show is back, with a day of LEGO displays, activities and a marketplace.

Visit: facebook.com/BrickLincs

Brick O' Deen (UK)

When: October 22

Where: Queens Cross Church, Aberdeen

What's on: LEGO displays, activities and traders at this charity show in North East Scotland.

Visit: tartanlug.com

Sheffield Brickfest (UK)

When: October 22 – 23

Where: High Storrs School, Sheffield

What's on: LEGO show in Sheffield featuring models, marketplace and activities.

Visit: sheffieldlug.org

Milton Keynes Brick Festival (UK)

When: October 29

Where: The Ridgeway Centre, Milton Keynes

What's on: LEGO displays and activities along with vendors selling new sets, old sets and loose bricks.

Visit: brickfestivalevents.com

NOVEMBER 2022

Shildon Brick Show (UK)

When: November 19 – 20

Where: Locomotion Museum, Shildon, County Durham

What's on: The UK's largest free entry LEGO show – LEGO displays from builders across the UK, activities and a marketplace.

Visit: brickalleylug.co.uk/shildon

Bristol Brick Show (UK)

When: November 19 – 20

Where: Gloucestershire County Cricket Club, Bristol

What's on: LEGO exhibitions and activities.

Visit: gertlug.co.uk/eventst

DECEMBER 2022

Monkey Bricks (UK)

When: September 3

Where: King's School, Ely

What's on: A one-day fan event with LEGO model displays, marketplace and activities.

Visit: facebook.com/groups/760519838304049

Train Show (USA)

When: December 4

Where: Civic Centre, Heywood

What's on: Produced by the Northern Illinois LEGO Train Club, it is the group's largest annual show with large scale train displays.

Visit: cantigny.org

BRICKSMAGGEE

PLAYFUL SINCE 2012

FROM THE VAULT

The LEGO Group had big plans for the monorails, but unfortunately the beloved system ran out of track

Words: Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, the LEGO Group

MONORAIL SETS WERE the LEGO dream for the generation of children who grew up during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the transportation system embodied an optimistic future. They still maintain a sort of hallowed place amongst AFOLs of a certain age and are sure to be found in almost any large Space or Town layout at a convention. The LEGO Group had big plans for these types of sets, releasing three core sets – 6990 Monorail Transport in 1987, 6399 Airport Shuttle in 1990 and 6991 Monorail Transport Base in 1994 before retiring all of the parts and moulds that made up the system.

The concept was conceived of in the mid-1980s as a joint venture between the Space and Town design teams. Their idea was to create a train system that could fit in tighter spaces and be elevated to weave among buildings, both on Earth and distant planets. Monorails would become regular features of Town just like police and fire stations along

with variants in sci-fi themes. A prototype was developed for Seatron, a hybrid space/underwater theme that eventually inspired Aquazone as well as additional concepts for both Space and Town. Because of this wide range of potential applications, the LEGO Group management green lit the expensive investment to manufacture moulds for the various track elements.

Unfortunately, the dream was not to be. All that investment had to be recouped, which meant monorail sets were drastically more expensive than almost any concurrent LEGO set. The final version, set 6991 from 1995, cost \$180 at the time (equivalent to \$340 today). While today there are many sets in that price range, in 1995 they were unheard of. Monorails didn't sell enough to justify continuing them, so they were scrapped along with all of the ideas for future variants. ■

6399 Airport Shuttle was the only monorail in Town.



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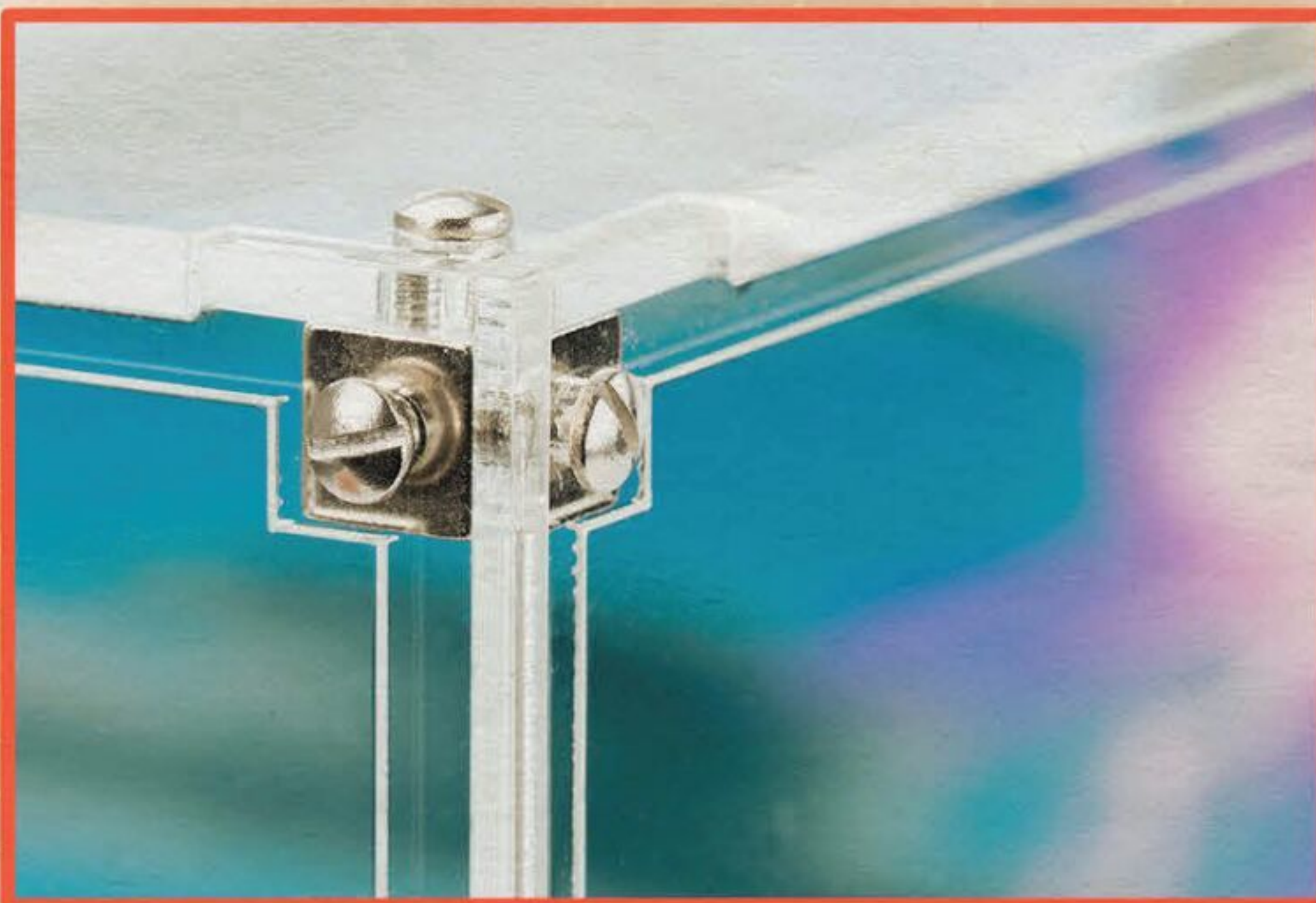
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